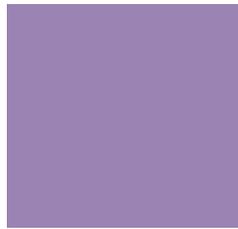


# Captured News Media

## *The Case of Turkey*

BY ANDREW FINKEL

October 2015





ABOUT CIMA

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), at the National Endowment for Democracy, works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of independent media development throughout the world.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Finkel is a British-educated journalist who has been based in Turkey since 1989, and has corresponded for a variety of print and broadcast media outlets, including The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Economist, TIME, and CNN. He also has worked in the Turkish language press, both in the newsroom as a featured columnist (Sabah, Milliyet, and Taraf) as well as on Turkish television.



In 2013 Finkel helped found P24, a Turkish registered non-profit organization whose mission is to support independent media in Turkey, and is an executive board member of that organization. In 2002-2003 Finkel was the Karsten Prager Fellow in International Reporting at the University of Michigan and in 2005 held a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellowship at the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington. He is the author of scholarly articles on press integrity. His second book, Turkey: What Everyone Needs to Know, is published by Oxford University Press.



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# Foreword

**W**hy are so many countries failing to create independent media that contribute to democracy and economic progress? That is a big and complex question, but we at the Center for International Media Assistance suggest that one piece of the answer may be found in a concept known as media capture.

Media capture is a systemic governance problem where political leaders and media owners work together in a symbiotic but mutually corrupting relationship: Media owners provide supportive news coverage to political leaders in exchange for favorable government treatment of their business and political interests. The favors may include increased government advertising or other financial benefits to the media industry itself. But perhaps more typical these days, the benefits accrue not so much to the media industry, but to the non-media interests of media owners in the form of regulatory changes, legislative measures, or lucrative government contracts. All the while, the political leaders get to bask in the glow of a fawning media.

Media capture is not the same as the old Soviet-style censorship and state ownership of the media that produced dry, official daily log of meetings and optimistic glosses on government activities. Indeed, captured media often chases its audiences with screaming headlines, political intrigue,

sex scandals, and melodramatic sports. It behaves much the same as hyper-competitive, commercialized media, though it operates on a fundamentally different economic model. Indeed, in many countries with a high degree of capture, profitability of the news media is not even the principle aim. Instead, the ability to influence large numbers of people and maintain the favor of government is enough. Profits come from elsewhere.

While this type of distortion of the media environment is nothing new, systemic media capture is becoming the dominant model of organization in a growing number of media markets across the world. CIMA staff members in Washington, DC, have in the last year met with successive delegations of media representatives and civil society advocates—from Indonesia to Nigeria, from Romania and Serbia to Nicaragua—all of whom have expressed their concern about this growing menace to the independence of media in their countries. The Media Ownership Project runs an ongoing survey



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of the ownership of news media—as of late 2015 numbering 530 outlets in 11 countries in Eastern Europe—and has found that 27 percent of owners have connections to politics, 10 percent connections to crime, and 42 percent with non-transparent ownership. In countries such as Ukraine and Moldova, non-transparent and offshore ownership of media by business tycoons affects well over half the media houses.\*

Media capture is a means by which public opinion is manipulated, vested interests are preserved, and political control is consolidated by a small elite. In countries such as Russia, it is a deliberate and organized campaign by an authoritarian leader. In others—as the visiting Indonesians speculated about their own case—it takes hold initially as a result of policy weaknesses and neglect. By the time societies become aware of it and start to try to curb its influence, the system is well entrenched, allowing elites to maintain a tight hold on the reins of power. It has huge implications for the political trajectory of countries, for their aspirations for democratic accountability, and for their ability to make and sustain successful economic policies.

We are pleased that Andrew Finkel agreed to look at Turkey through this lens. This highly personal essay by a British-educated journalist and longtime resident of the country includes a thoughtful review of the capture concept and its origins. He looks at the history of media capture in the Turkish context. Finally he proposes some thoughts on how the media development community might respond—or at least think about this problem going forward.

Indeed, we have a long way to go before we are able to measure the extent of the global spread of the capture phenomenon or come up with effective policies to combat it. CIMA hopes to contribute to a greater awareness of this type of media system, to begin understanding how it gets started, how it operates, and how it sustains itself. We also want to explore what the media development community can do about it. We are delighted to start the search for answers with this thought-provoking contribution.

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\* <https://www.reportingproject.net/media/> (accessed on 9/28/2015).

# Introduction

This essay explores the applicability of the concept of capture to media integrity and regulation. The term is used to analyze the recent institutional history of the Turkish press and to depict how media has become the handmaiden of the very forces it is intended to hold accountable. More especially, capture is used to examine the media's shifting role in a country where the relationship between political and economic interests is itself in a process of transformation.

Turkey provides a rich example of what (to extend the metaphor) might be called “ambush,” or a process whereby media that set out to maximize its influence in non-press economic spheres is itself waylaid. Newspapers and media organizations have changed hands under dramatic circumstances over the last two decades, suggesting that ownership has gone from being an effective tool for the harvest of economic rent to a potential liability. Media's decline in political effectiveness perversely exposes proprietors to a high degree of political risk.

Understanding the economic climate and business model under which media operate is an obvious first step to promoting media independence. Often, and for good reasons, democracy promotion agencies focus on authoritarian state practices when analyzing limitations on press freedom rather than on how news organizations may themselves be structurally compromised or actively complicit in this process. Capture thus provides a framework to formulate a strategy to restore press integrity. Yet, while news organizations may be captured, news itself is more elusive. It is a commodity but not a fungible one. Political hegemony over media may be at the expense of that same media's ability to deliver a credible message. Depicting media as a public good whose value may be squandered provides context to discussions of how to give citizenry a renewed stake in a free and fair press.



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## Capture and its Applicability to Turkish Media

The notion of “capture”<sup>1</sup> describes the hijacking of public resources and administration by narrow, special, or even criminal interests and the consequent subversion of the public good. The concept implies an understanding both of how institutions should behave and how the reality deviates from that ideal.



*Applied to the media, capture describes the tension between media as a public good...and media as an economic and political actor co-opted into the processes it is meant to observe.*

As formulated by Chicago school economists, capture refers to a propensity of state regulatory agencies to further the interest not of consumers or citizens but of the industries over which they stand vigil.<sup>2</sup> Originally designed as a conservative caveat against bureaucratic interference in the market, the concept can be used from a liberal perspective to demonstrate how watchdog institutions are made subject to powerful or class interests. Capture is, thus, a tendency to be identified and resisted through greater transparency and more effective civil society. Left unchecked, capture leads to criminality. “State capture” is synonymous with high-level, intractable corruption—an absence of democratic mechanisms and license for a mafia-run or kleptocratic polity.<sup>3</sup>

Applied to the media, capture describes the tension between media as a public good (in the case of Turkey where media rights are recognized and guaranteed but also qualified by the constitution<sup>4</sup>) and media as an economic and political actor co-opted into the processes it is meant to observe.

That this tension is scarcely unique to Turkey is evinced by the following quotation about the Mexican press used to illustrate media relations in many of the countries of Southeast Asia.

*Outside observers who look for examples of direct government censorship, monopolization of the distribution of newsprint and limitless government power to suppress or publicise news and commentary fail to grasp the nature of the relationship between the governments and the media—a complex network of mutual benefits, commitments and favours, difficult to penetrate and even more difficult to reform.<sup>5</sup>*

There are degrees and shades of capture. Joseph E. Stiglitz speaks of “cognitive capture” to depict the enthrallment of financial journalists prior to the Lehman Brothers crisis who had, as it were, gone native by internalizing the values of the industry whose activities they should

have been holding up to scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the very expression “Fourth Estate” did not always mean an independent pillar of democratic societies but (as attributed to Edmund Burke) poked fun at the pretensions of those who packed the press gallery of the British parliament and who thought themselves equal in status to the three “real” powers of the land.<sup>7</sup> A related phenomenon is that of “source-dependent journalists” who in exchange for exclusive information often perform as unacknowledged spokesperson for a particular public figure. In Turkey as elsewhere, media consumers learn how to read between the lines, compensate for bias, or to associate this or that columnist with the views of a particular politician—or even recognize news planted by national intelligence agencies.<sup>8</sup>

That journalists are sometimes reluctant to publish or be damned may not require complex explanation. Despite the image of the journalism profession as giving a premium to man-bites-dog, counter-intuitive information, there are often informal sanctions in going against nationalist or simply popular sentiment. One definition of a scoop, born of professional exasperation, is the story your editors read in someone else’s newspaper. Lone voices are often overlooked or ignored. It becomes an ethical question or one of professional standards how closely media obeys the dictates of national security or risks undermining market sentiment. The buildup to the 2008–2009 U.S. financial crisis is one example where the journalistic community listened to the financial markets’ need for confidence more closely than to the need for transparency.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the *Financial Times* correspondent in Turkey came under bitter attack in 2000 for the all too prophetic warning that the poor asset quality of Turkish banks risked generating a major crisis.<sup>10</sup>

“The broken arm remains within the sleeve,” is the Turkish maxim that reinforces the merits of the keeping bad news hidden.

By any standards, press capture in Turkey is at the extreme end of the scale, better serving to protect the state from the individual than the ideal democratic order of protecting the individual from the state. A notorious example of this was a summit on October 20, 2011, in which the prime minister summoned to Ankara a group of 35 senior media figures to discuss how best to filter news of bloody cross-border attacks then being mounted by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). An account of this meeting was published the next day in the newspaper *Taraf* by one of the few openly dissenting voices and described a near universal eagerness among those assembled to self-censor.<sup>11</sup> Attendees even appealed for guidelines as to how many seconds per broadcast could be devoted to unpalatable news items, and there was a proposal



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to set up a council, to be chaired by the prime minister himself, that would act as an official censor. Such eagerness to toe the line appeared to have taken the government side of the table by surprise, and these more extreme suggestions were rejected, presumably out of politicians’ reluctance to be seen dictating media coverage.

An example of the consequences of this subservience came two months later when mainstream television stations initially ignored news that 34 Kurdish villagers from Roboski near the Iraqi border had been killed in a raid by air force jets. Instead, the story leaked out through social media that those who died were not armed PKK guerrillas but local smugglers, some of them in their early teens. One presenter of a CNN-Turk morning show was fired for ignoring orders being barked into her earpiece from the control room to not mention the event on air.<sup>12</sup>

That mainstream media did not hesitate to censor such an important story is, of course, an abdication of the obligation to hold officialdom accountable. For the press itself to be an accomplice in a failed cover-up was a display of indifference to the population it is intended to serve. However, from the perspective of a government trying to create trust in a Kurdish peace process, it was far more damaging to have bad news leak out through the fog of self-censorship and cover-up than through normal reporting. It was one of a series of incidents that was to disillusion conservative ethnic Kurdish voters who had supported the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) against more radical Kurdish nationalists. The subsequent defection of this section of the electorate in the June 2015 election cost the AKP its majority in parliament.

On subsequent occasions when media bosses and editors consult with ministers behind closed doors, the meetings have been officially described without irony as “not open to the press.”

The recent history of the Turkish press offers myriad examples of its failure to protect its own integrity or to define the public interest independently of the spin imposed by the ruling party. Turkish courts impose (and only a few independent organizations defy) news blackouts on major stories where the public has a clear right to know—including those dealing with a deadly terrorist attack in May 2013 in Reyhanlı, a town near the Syrian border in which 51 people died; evidence that national intelligence was involved in running munitions to Islamic militants across the Syrian border; and even a horrendous coal mining accident in 2014 in the Aegean town of Soma that killed 301 people. When the leader of the opposition attempted to play a tape under parliamentary privilege purporting to incriminate the prime minister and

## World Press Freedom Index

*Turkey ranks in 149th place in the Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index, below Zimbabwe and Burma/Myanmar. In its 2014 report, Freedom House demoted Turkish media from being “partly free” to “not free.” Turkey remains the only nation in its European peer group to be so dishonored.*



his son in high-level corruption, major television stations including the public broadcaster TRT, cut him off in mid-sentence.

Turkey has vied with China in recent years as the leading jailer of journalists according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (it lead the field in 2013 as it had done 15 years earlier<sup>13</sup>); recent improvements in this record are the result of a more sophisticated strategy of punishing dissent by having journalists blacklisted and fired.<sup>14</sup> Turkey ranks in 149th place in the Reporters without Borders *World Press Freedom Index*, below Zimbabwe and Burma/Myanmar. In its 2014 report, Freedom House demoted Turkish media from being “partly free” to “not free.” Turkey remains the only nation in its European peer group to be so dishonored.<sup>15</sup> Yet perhaps the more damning anomaly is that the Freedom House downgrade was deeply criticized on the front pages of the very Turkish press the Washington-based organization had set out to defend, in one notable case on the grounds that its then-director was of Jewish ancestry.<sup>16</sup>

In Turkey, therefore, capture might seem a conceptual sledgehammer to crack the all too obvious phenomenon of a national press in functional disarray. The argument here, however, is that this disarray is the result of a history of collusion and accommodation between media and state authoritarianism. An analysis of this process goes some way in unravelling the enigma of Turkey as a country committed to free and fair elections, European Union membership, and to the rule of law, and that yet at some level does not want to democratize.

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## Media, State, and Economy

The history of the Turkish media, unsurprisingly, parallels many of the post-war changes in political economy. That history is of a closed economy—based on import-substituting industrialization—being integrated into global markets. This integration was accompanied by a massive movement of population from the countryside to the cities. A population that was 75 percent rural after World War II is nearly 75 percent urban now. This metamorphosis created social strain, leading to three periods of martial law (1960–61, 1971–73, and 1980–83) and the continued presence of the military in political life well into the 2000s.



*The imposition of martial law was always justified as the need to impose stability on an inchoate and anarchic civil society, but it also served to legitimize the spoils distributed during the “chaos” of democratic rule.*

While this might suggest that Turkey alternated between a populist democracy and openly authoritarian rule, it also suggests there was some symbiosis between the two. The imposition of martial law was always justified as the need to impose stability on an inchoate and anarchic civil society, but it also served to legitimize the spoils distributed during the “chaos” of democratic rule. For example, settlements built semi-illegally on state land and in defiance of planning procedures in the 1970s received legal status and were integrated into the urban grid after the 1980 military coup.

The post war-political machine, which had managed the expansion of Turkish cities, collapsed during the economic crisis of 2000–2001. It was rebuilt under the AKP at a time when Turkey was fully globalized and the spoils that much more lucrative.<sup>17</sup> If in the past, politicians had become expert at looking the other way at “rogue urbanization,” the AKP began to organize that process itself. Changing zoning regulations was one way of creating vast urban rent. AKP administration became associated with mega-urban infrastructure projects intended to open the remaining green spaces, particularly in Istanbul, to urban development. The state housing agency, known by its acronym TOKİ, became literally a law unto itself, able to create its own planning procedures and essentially to build what it wanted, and where.

While there is broad consensus that the AKP succeeded in clipping the wings of the military, it has clearly not been able

to replace this with a system of governance dependent on democratic consensus. Between its initial election in 2002 and losing a parliamentary majority in 2015, the AKP has imitated the stop-start democratic cycle of previous decades. It moved from being a government committed to civil libertarianism and decentralization of power to one that is virtually a crypto-form of martial law—careless of the rule of law, intolerant of dissent, and committed to ideological uniformity.

The greatest recent challenge to the AKP’s consolidation of power was a series of revelations initiated by police raids in December 2013. These uncovered what prosecutors said was evidence implicating the prime minister and his family, as well as political and business associates, in massive and systematic corruption. The government branded the raids as nothing short of a coup—the actions of a “parallel state” bent on pulling it down. It blamed the followers of a self-exiled cleric, Fethullah Gülen whose followers were well represented in the police and judiciary and who had substantial business interests as well as a sympathetic media group. The government fought back by reassigning those involved in the investigation and introducing legislation to give the cabinet more say over the functioning of the courts.

Then, in February 2014, just weeks before nationwide municipal elections, a series of police phone taps began to leak onto the Internet that seemed to confirm the very worst of the corruption allegations.

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In Turkey as elsewhere, it is not so much the Woodward and Bernsteins who drove the political agenda following the ground rules of legacy media but the Mannings and Snowdens prying open the Pandora's Box. In the Turkish case, the most damaging revelations have been the work of a pseudonymous source called Fuat Avni, who operates through Twitter and similar platforms.

One such recording, posted on YouTube and much linked to on Twitter, purported to be then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan interrogating his son about whether he has managed to dispose of cash hidden in the house. "Did you make it vanish," the voice asks, to which a bumbling reply comes: "There are only about 30 million euros left." While Erdoğan described that particular conversation as a "montage" created through electronic trickery, other leaks almost as damaging were never denied. In another recording, the prime minister discusses with a friendly businessman how to reverse the reward of a state tender. In another, he talks to his minister of justice how to get the preferred verdict in an important trial.<sup>18</sup>

Such revelations might be expected to have produced a feeding frenzy among the nation's press corps. That this was not the case is because some of the most damaging revelations implicated the press itself.

In one of the recordings the prime minister micro-manages the way the private Habertürk television channel displays its news, dressing down a senior executive for broadcasting the views of an opposition politician on the ticker at the bottom of the screen, and the offending banner is removed. In another leak, the prime minister reduces the elderly head of the Demirören Group of Companies to actual tears after his *Milliyet* newspaper printed a story that embarrassed the government's Kurdish policy. "How did I get involved in this business?" he asks between sobs. Demirören's other interests include property development and liquefied natural gas, enterprises dependent to some extent on government grace and favor. Perhaps the most damning conversation is among members of the consortium who won the \$29 billion bid to build the third Istanbul airport. They make it clear that they had been frogmarched into buying the loss-making Turkuaz Media Group, which includes the newspaper *Sabah*, in order to rescue another pro-government business group that had owned the paper and whose CEO was the prime minister's son-in-law.

## Historical Background: A Media on the Offensive Is Itself Captured

Capture suggests a process of deterioration. This is not to posit a golden age of the Turkish press. If the newspapers of the 1960s earned their keep through sales and ads, many of those ads were provided by the government agencies or state economic enterprises under political supervision. An unexpected instrument with which the government attempted to control printed media was the pricing and allocation of newsprint itself, produced by the state paper factory or subject to import controls.<sup>19</sup> Even so, one could at least make the case that newspaper proprietors understood how to operate in a rough market but were also sympathetic to journalism itself.

One could also argue that a coercive political environment encouraged newspapers to compete on technological advance or give-away promotions as much as on content. In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, newspapers could be removed from the stands or punished with not being allowed to distribute the next day. Technicians from *Sabah* (founded in 1985) advised the short-lived British daily *Today* (1986) on color offset printing. The early 1990s were notorious for their encyclopedia wars when people bought newspapers less for the headlines than the front-page coupons to be collected and redeemed for a set of *Britannica* or *Larousse*.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, many of the unhealthy aspects of the Turkish press are simply a distortion through scale of tendencies rooted in this not so distant past. Malik Yolaç, who purchased the newspaper *Akşam* in 1957, described in an interview 50 years later resisting a government attempt to win his editorial backing by recruiting him as a member of parliament. *Akşam* became a hive of the best-known writers of its day, universally opposed to the government. This, Yolaç told his interviewer, led to the paper's ruin as advertisers came under political pressure to move elsewhere. ("It was too expensive to fire them" he said of the offending writers who were entitled to substantial severance pay—a practice which proprietors were later to avoid by using non-unionized labor).<sup>21</sup> Editors of *Taraf*, a newspaper established in 2007, complained of similarly orchestrated commercial pressures when the gap between it and the government it had indirectly supported became too wide.

The newspaper *Güneş* was relaunched as a quality daily in 1989, consciously modeled on the London *Independent*. For all its novel



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## Recent History of Turkey and its Media



emphasis on human rights and women's issues, it was obliged to fire the columnist Yalçın Pekşen who had offended President Özal. Behind closed doors, the Demirel government of the early the 1990s called to heel *Sabah*—then a social democrat-leaning broadsheet, after its leading columnists criticized a prominent minister. The paper printed a full retraction under the implicit threat of tax inspectors turning over the books.<sup>22</sup> It was an open secret in newsrooms well before the AKP party came to power that certain colleagues took instructions from national intelligence. Among the most notorious incidents were the front pages in the national press that served as justification for a military operation to end a hunger strike in Turkish prisons in 2000 during which 29 people died. The following year, four people died in a police operation to end a hunger strike in an Istanbul neighborhood—an event preceded by much exaggerated headlines of an intifada-style rebellion in the heart of the city.<sup>23</sup>

Regularly scheduled television broadcasting began only in 1971, after military intervention, and appear to have been designed in a way to prevent control from falling into overt party political hands. Private television began in Turkey in 1990, after the state was forced by satellite technology to surrender its constitutionally guaranteed monopoly. The first challenge came from Star television, which began life as a pirate station, rebroadcasting as a terrestrial signal a transmission beamed in from abroad. It operated with political protection of one of its co-owners, Ahmet Özal, the son of the president, and was well positioned when the law changed and terrestrial frequencies were publically allocated. In that sense, its business model was little different in principle from those new migrants to the city who occupied land in the hope of obtaining a title



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to an illegally constructed home once the rights to settle were politically negotiated. The station served out a diet of popular foreign series but also had a news operation.

In time, Ahmet Özal was maneuvered out of the business by his partners, the notorious Uzan family, who used Star’s clout to further a business empire with the acquisition of privatized state assets. These included cement, power generation and distribution, and a global system for mobile (GSM) operating license. The group also had a bank. Under the Uzans, media became a tool of organized crime.<sup>24</sup> The parent company for example, stripped the assets of the publicly listed Çukorava Elektrik (including depositing revenues in their own bank at no interest) forcing an 85 percent drop in the share price in dollar terms. When the Turkish Capital Market Board tried in 1995 to intervene, its head drew vicious nightly attacks on Star television. At one stage, the incident—in which minority foreign investors were the principal victims—threatened to undermine the credibility of the burgeoning Istanbul stock exchange.

Yet for all that, Star had a profound impact on the Turkish public, who for the first time was to see coverage of the Kurdish New Year’s uprisings in the southeast of the country or even just a live broadcast from Ankara giving a wrap-up of the day’s political news. The channel was joined by a host of rivals. All-night talk shows where participants could say what they wanted pretty much for as long as they wanted gave viewers the sense they were being liberated from the shackles of martial rule

Competition within the industry—the need for print media to co-brand itself alongside television (where most people now get their news)

## Business Interests of Two Leading Media Houses

### Sabah Newspaper (Medya Group)

1985	Sabah Founded by Dinç Bilgin
1998	Bilgin acquires partnership in Etibank
2000	Bilgin's Medya Sabah Holding buys Etibank outright
2000	Etibank collapses shares taken into receivership; media interests leased to group controlled by businessman Turgay Ciner
2005	Medya Holding sold outright sold to Merkez (Ciner) Group for \$433 million
2007	Sale invalidated; media group taken back into receivership
2008	Sale finalized to Çalık Holding, a conglomerate in which the prime minister's son-in-law was CEO, at public valuation of \$1.1 billion
2013	Media properties resold to Kalyon Group

### Doğan Group

1979	Aydın Doğan buys <i>Milliyet</i> newspaper (founded 1950)
1994	Doğan Publications acquires controlling share in <i>Hürriyet</i> newspaper
1998	Doğan group wins public auction for Petrol Ofisi, a petroleum holding company
2005	Sells Dışbank for \$1.1 billion
2009	Group slapped with \$2.5 billion tax fine, later increased to \$3.3 billion
2011	Sells <i>Vatan</i> and <i>Milliyet</i> newspapers to Demirören-led partnership, whose interests include property development and liquefied natural gas, enterprises to some degree dependent on government favor.

required large investment—meant that it became increasingly difficult for these groups to exist as stand-alone businesses rather than as an accessory of a larger corporate portfolio. The 1990s were also a period of unstable coalition governments and it became increasingly possible to leverage, in predatory fashion, press influence in non-press commercial spheres. Media ownership became a tool for obtaining any number of government favors from industrial incentives to inside trading positions in the privatization of public assets. Bank licenses were a particular carrot. The 1990s were a decade during which the average rate of inflation was 70 percent and banking became a simple, lucrative business that involved collecting deposits to lend to the government at huge spreads.<sup>25</sup> To arrest an interest rate crisis in 1994, the government gave a full guarantee on all deposits and in essence a free rein for malpractice.

It is possible to see the 1995 general election as a contest not between two center-right parties, but the two different media groups that backed them—each hoping to collect the spoils if its candidate won.<sup>26</sup> The voters decided to punish both camps and it was the religious right that crept through the middle (a predecessor to AKP) winning 21.3 percent of the vote. This in turn, ushered in an even greater period of instability.

Dinç Bilgin, the majority shareholder of *Sabah* and ATV television confessed in a 2010 interview, the sins of his industry:

*After 1995 there was a kind of looting in Turkey. Let us say, a tender on energy distribution was at stake. One of them [the tenders] went to the İhlas [media] Group, the other to Show TV and the third to another. It had become that bizarre. Managers of my newspaper were frustrated that we were unable to get a share. They'd say, "Boss, let us do this or that business." I resisted, but the economy changed shape between 1995 and 1997, and each media group had its own bank. This was the beginning for Sabah to enter financial relations with the government. When you have a bank...you lose your freedom. This is what happened and marked the end of journalism here.<sup>26</sup>*

Many of the proprietors of the 1990s did not simply lose their professional room for maneuver; they lost both their

banks and their media organizations as well. By 2001, the vicious circle of a government paying high interest rates to roll over its debts had collapsed in a currency crisis, and banks could no longer refinance their own lending. For a brief period, interest rates soared into the thousands of percentage points, state owned banks turned out to be insolvent and some two dozen commercial banks, including those associated with *Sabah* and *Star* bit the dust, the former with \$800 million worth of debt, the latter with a staggering figure in excess of \$7 billion. The cost to the nation of meeting insured deposits of all the failed banks was almost a third of GDP. Group assets, including television stations and newspapers were taken into public receivership in the attempt to pay the taxpayer back.

In 1995, Turkish media groups were inadvertent doorkeepers to the rise of an Islamist party. In the run-up to the Lehman crisis, the Western financial press may have been in dereliction of its responsibilities to warn and avert. A decade earlier, the Turkish media were full participants in a system that led both to their own financial undoing and to the obliteration of the post-war political class in which they had played a major part. At the 2002 general election, no political party that had been in power at the time of the crisis managed to win any seat in the new parliament.<sup>28</sup>

The newly ascendant AKP came to power on a tide of public disillusionment and without the support of any of the substantial media organizations. A newspaper they did control, *Yeni Şafak*, was very much preaching to the converted. The circumstances which brought the AKP to power also gifted it with large media groups in public receivership. These were eventually hived off to business conglomerates sympathetic to their cause. The Turkuaz Group that included *Sabah* and ATV was eventually sold off to the Calik Group in 2008, a conglomerate in which the prime minister's son-in-law was CEO. Two state-owned banks lent \$750 million toward the \$1.1 billion acquisition.<sup>29</sup>

The transfer of ownership continued. Çukurova Media Group, which included *Akşam* and *Güneş* newspapers, and Sky360 TV was similarly seized in 2013 to repay the parent group's public debt and sold to Ethem Sancak, a businessman who publicly declared a spiritual love for Erdoğan (even offering to sacrifice his family for him if required).<sup>30</sup> State regulators declared open war on Bank Asya the participation finance house associated with the Gülen movement. Early on in the assault, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan (in apparent violation of banking laws) declared the bank insolvent in what looked to be an attempt to trigger a run on its assets.<sup>31</sup> The presumed motive of such an attack was to weaken the financial underpinnings of the Gülen movement, and to harm its media interests.

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*The Doğan publications' long tradition of extracting government favors or, when the current changed, sailing close to the political wind, did little to win it sympathy with a larger public. It also encouraged the government to foster a loyalist press of its own that would protect against what they saw as the political blackmail of the corrupt, secular old guard.*

The Doğan media group had been the most powerful political kingmaker in 1990s, helping to orchestrate the infamous “post-modern” coup in 1997 to unseat the coalition led by the AKP’s predecessor. Its influence was revealed by a rare (at the time) leaked wiretap from 1998 in which the editor-in-chief of the group’s flagship *Hürriyet* newspaper casually asks the minister of finance the fate of a \$50 million subsidy for a \$130 million packaging factory owned by the holding company. The parent company, which included real estate and the formerly state-owned downstream petroleum retailers (Petrol Ofisi) was far more professionally run than its rivals. Instead of being caught out by the 2001 devaluation, Doğan Holding sold its own bank (Dışbank) in 2005 for \$1.1 billion.

However, the Doğan media’s attempt to exercise similar influence during the AKP’s ascendancy failed. In 2009, it faced two successive tax bills for a total of about \$3 billion, a figure roughly equivalent to the market capital of its parent company. The fine was largely seen as retaliation for the group’s opposition to the rise of the AKP in general and more particularly to the papers’ reporting of a case in the German courts concerning an Islamic charity, suspected of siphoning donations to support a pro-AKP television station.

In the end the Doğan Group negotiated a major reduction in the fine but not before it had sold two of its newspapers, *Milliyet* and *Vatan*, to a pro-government businessman. We know the new proprietor consulted with the prime minister over whom to appoint as editor-in-chief not through any leak but because Erdoğan explained as much publicly and without embarrassment.<sup>32</sup> Another result was that the Doğan-owned media became much more circumspect in its criticism of the government and instituted a form of in-house censorship. *Hürriyet*’s senior art correspondent took on the role of blue-pencilling columnists likely to offend the government.

The Doğan publications’ long tradition of extracting government favors or, when the current changed, sailing close to the political wind, did little to win it sympathy with a larger public. It also encouraged the government to foster a loyalist press of its own that would protect against what they saw as the political blackmail of the corrupt, secular old guard.

The AKP’s relationship with the media that supports it is, of course, no less venal. However, there is also an element of “ideological capture”—that it is important to nurture a press that will support the new order it is trying to create. This is evinced in the following quotation from the chairman of one of the pro-government media groups in Turkey in urging that the publicly owned broadcaster TRT get on board with the government’s rhetorical campaign to create “a new Turkey”:

*TRT must be the guiding light during the process of establishing the media of the New Turkey. Turkey has reached its potential in one leap, in a way that arouses envy among both friend and foe alike; now it is time for TRT to make that same leap.<sup>33</sup>*

“You have to remember what we are trying to accomplish,” the head of one private media group finally said in response to aggressive questioning by a Freedom House fact-finding mission in November 2013 over what were then unconfirmed rumors that ministers were all too ready to pick up the phone to instruct editors how to cover the news. It was the assertion of an ideological cadre or at best a show of frustration for being scolded by naïve outsiders unaware of the power struggle with the old guard taking place and the need to fight fire with fire.<sup>34</sup>

Consider the dilemma of the Media Association, set up in 2010 as a non-profit organization with a mission to “foster, support and elevate” press standards that would render Turkey a more democratic society. It did so with the backing of the emerging pro-government media groups who had banded together in reaction to bodies like the Turkish Press Council,<sup>35</sup> an organization which Media Association members regarded as a lap dog for Turkey’s secular old guard. By June 2013 these same members were facing a major crisis of credibility.



*Taksim Square during protests in Turkey in June 2013 in Istanbul.*

Photo credit: © Evren Kalinbaçak / Shutterstock.com



Riots in Istanbul in 2013 were triggered by an environmental protest to prevent Gezi Park from being turned into a shopping mall.

The trigger was an environmental protest to prevent Gezi Park, adjacent to Istanbul's Taksim Square from being turned into a shopping mall. Police heavy handedness in quelling the demonstrators transformed peaceful scenes into ones of urban riot. Infamously, many television channels refused to report events, which, in the case of the large private station HaberTürk, was literally around the corner from its own headquarters. Media indifference accelerated the exodus to social media that was outside any single organization's control.

Much of the protesters' anger was reserved not for pro-government newspapers and television channels represented by the Media Association members (their hostility was taken for granted) but the more obviously secular television stations and newspapers they had previously trusted. The penguin became the demonstrators' virtual mascot—penguins were the subject of a documentary that the Doğan-held CNN Turkish franchise preferred to air when the demonstrations first erupted. Yet another station located near the financial district, NTV, was picketed by lunchtime demonstrators for its eagerness to comply with government spin that the protests were part of a well-organized conspiracy.<sup>36</sup> Its outside broadcasting van in Taksim Square was attacked and destroyed.

For some, Gezi brought home the realization that their opinions about major issues—notably the Kurdish situation in the southeast of the country—had been filtered for decades by the same newsrooms that were now distorting the events that people were “photographing, tweeting about, and seeing with their own eyes.”<sup>37</sup>

We now know from the leaks mentioned above that the government left little to chance in preventing mainstream media from deviating from its own interpretation of the Gezi events.<sup>38</sup> “Democracy demands sacrifice,” was the copycat headline of six separate pro-government newspapers—a quotation from the prime minister as he addressed a late night rally that greeted him at the airport on his returned from a trip abroad to deal with the Gezi crisis—the clear implication being that Erdoğan, not the beaten and tear-gassed protestors, was the real victim and for this he was prepared to lay down his life. Gezi accelerated a process of wholesale dismissal of journalists dissenting from the government line—be they senior columnists, a health correspondent critical of hospital care, or even a duty photographer stopping to chat with a friend in a protest line on the way into work.<sup>39</sup> *Sabah* even fired its own ombudsman as he tried to deal with a tide of readers’ complaints.<sup>40</sup>

With the reputation of its members at an all-time low, the Media Association struggled to reply. It did so not by searching its own soul but rounding on its critics. On June 29, 2013, it issued a press release bemoaning unspecified provocations as well as protests against journalists and media organizations that “had reached a level endangering the freedom of the press and of expression” and that news organizations should “be free to cover stories in the way they see fit.” In essence, an organization dedicated to trying to create a more democratic society was pressured into defending the right to self-censorship as a form of free expression.<sup>41</sup> In the end, the Media Association was to cease operations after its two principle constituents, the *Zaman* group loyal to the cleric Fethullah Gülen and those loyal to the AKP fell out—the latter blaming the former for undermining the government with allegations of corruption.

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Photo credit: © Sadık Güleç / Shutterstock.com

## The Implications of Capture for Democracy Promotion

How can so damaged a national media be repaired? In theory, at least, it is market forces that help guard the press from capture or the abuse of its own powers. The competition between the variety of published and broadcast media and the constant vigilance of social media serves as protection against the abuses (or timidity) of any particular individual press organ. To surrender credibility undermines commercial viability. News organizations jealously guard their good names not for altruistic motives but to survive in a crowded marketplace.<sup>42</sup> “Accuracy” was the correct answer to the famous Bloomberg News final interview question where Editor-in-chief Mathew Winkler would reportedly ask all perspective employees to name the most important journalistic virtue.



*A free and independent (“uncaptured”) media may therefore rely on its reputation as a precondition for its viability, but it is by no means a sufficient condition of profitability in an Internet age.*

Virtue in itself, does not bring reward, particularly in a climate where it is increasingly difficult to get end users to pay for content. The news industry is of course in the throes of a technological revolution with the devaluation of brands and even yesterday’s innovations like the home page.<sup>43</sup> Traditional equations between readership and revenue are being redefined, if not breaking down altogether.

A free and independent (“uncaptured”) media may therefore rely on its reputation as a precondition for its viability, but it is by no means a sufficient condition of profitability in an Internet age. By contrast, a corrupted press has already solved the problem of balancing the books by running media as a loss leader—using the influence that press ownership brings to secure any number of government favors including government tenders, incentives, favorable changes in land zoning, and advertising from government agencies or state-controlled enterprises.

Thus, it seems almost impossible to persuade a media organization to abandon the warm waters of a business model based on some degree of corruption that at least works and to plunge into the icy currents of genuine competition.

However, even for this corrupted model to work, media has to retain influence to peddle. Thus, news organizations acquire a crooked policemen’s instinct of when to behave and when to bend the rules. For media to ignore its own credibility means ultimately to abdicate not just its responsibility but the power it hopes to wield. This has occurred in Turkey.

Instead of media extracting favors from government, government demands cooperation from them. Typically, in the first instance, media owners are lured into non-media businesses; in the latter, companies which do business with government are encouraged to acquire media—a sort of political levy on earnings. The proprietor who is made to weep because his newspaper has shown signs of independence or the members of a building consortium who feel bullied at having to fork out hundreds of millions of dollars to rescue a fellow crony over-invested in media have little concept of media as a public service. They are acting at the behest of a government that wants to ensure that branded media organizations that have established their reputations in a previous era dance to an official tune. These media groups are “fed” with the advertising that government can command while at the same time large commercial advertisers are warned off supporting dissident titles. Local news media are particularly vulnerable—many of which survive on official advertisements of state tenders or general public announcements.<sup>44</sup>

Turkey has reached a position where the press has assumed the function of propaganda—which in the context of this paper has a very specific meaning of giving no or scant market value to integrity or reputation. Media adjusts (in cases, literally photoshopping<sup>45</sup>) reality to its perception and political exigency rather than the other way round. This, in turn, leads to what one could call a “Midas touch” syndrome in which the government’s desire for control is ultimately too successful and ends up destroying the value of media on which it relies. A partisan media is of limited use when its audience reads too deeply between its lines.

There are two competing consequences of such degradation. The first is that the whole notion of public discourse is devalued. Some authors suggest that the strategy of oppressive governments is not so much to censor but to destroy media itself, in the literal sense of rendering it incapable of being a conduit of information,<sup>46</sup> a case not so much of capture as “if-I-can’t-have-it-nobody-can” spoliation. The other possibility is that content “escapes” to other media, and that social platforms like Twitter become the new samizdat. In the run-up to nationwide local election in 2014, government tried to limit allegations of corruption in the social media by banning Twitter altogether.<sup>47</sup> The result was that tech-savvy users easily side-stepped the ban and one estimate is that Twitter usage actually increased by 138 percent.<sup>48</sup>

These two possibilities are not mutually exclusive. One (perhaps over-ingenious) argument is that the government did not actually believe it could stop people from using Twitter but hoped it could discredit Twitter in the eyes of its own supporters.<sup>49</sup> Political polarization means, precisely, ensuring that people fail to engage with opposition views



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*A conscious policy decision to discredit social media would mean government denying itself a very powerful means of communication. There are, after all, 11 million Twitter users in Turkey.*

(“they would say that, wouldn’t they”). Certainly there is an attempt to demonize foreign media criticism as being motivated by an attempt to arrest Turkish ascendancy and the country’s growing ability to play a regional leadership role.<sup>50</sup> However, a conscious policy decision to discredit social media would mean government denying itself a very powerful means of communication. There are, after all, 11 million Twitter users in Turkey.

The converse of this is that governments may enjoy hegemony over media, but this may be at the expense of that media’s ability to deliver a credible message. Politicians can command the airwaves, but listeners can tune out. In short, you can spin some of the news all of the time but an attempt to obfuscate all of the news all of the time can badly backfire.

The AKP’s great accomplishment was winning a nation-wide municipal election in 2014 in the wake of very damaging allegations of corruption. By the general election of 2015, its control of the media was near total. The Turkish president defied the constitutional dictate that he remain above the political fray. One speech slamming the opposition parties received more than 10 hours of airtime. In one campaign week alone, Erdoğan’s speeches received 44 hours of air play (April 27–May 3, 2015), seven hours of which appeared on the (by charter) impartial state broadcaster TRT broadcasting.<sup>51</sup> However, in the June 7 election, the AKP for the first time in its existence lost its overall majority (47 percent of the seats) with just less than 41 percent of the vote.

Certainly the conclusion for the community whose brief it is to promote democracy and press freedom is that there are limits to the ability to address problems by criticizing governments alone. There is an understandable tendency for such organizations to seek an interlocutor for their outrage, most often in the high-handedness of states that censor, imprison, and in other ways restrict media independence. It is far more difficult to wag a finger at media organizations that are all too often complicit in this process. One reason is that is tendentious to criticize media for not being as courageous as one would like. Another, is that there is a narrow line between criticizing media for its lack of integrity and trying to impose a specific editorial line. The example above of the Media Association defending its right to censor as a right of free expression may be an absurd example, but media do have a right to defend as well as criticize their own government. The question is whether they still enjoy that right when their silence is dictated to them down a telephone line. Even then, it is not always easy to throw the first stone. Turkish media has become expert in finding fault with the ethical standards of international media—delighting in the hypocrisy of others as an excuse not to acknowledge its own.<sup>52</sup>

However, for media watchdog organizations to avoid criticism of the ethical standards of media and concentrate solely on state coercion is to avoid half the problem. Media capture left unchallenged opens the door to high levels of corruption. Getting the media to look the other way, to distract with nationalist tantrums is part of grand corruption strategy.

There is an argument that “private corruption” is simply another term for stealing in which the private sector, not the public, pays the price. However, news is not just privately owned information but a public service and a public good. Societies therefore suffer if news industries are corrupted just as they would be if petrochemical revenues are siphoned off or dams built with low grade cement. Media corruption is as noxious and as costly as corruption in its more familiar forms.

A final point is that those who support media independence should not just criticize capture but encourage “escape,” i.e., support alternative forums where public debate finds refuge.

The value of a free press, aware of its own professional standards, requires no elaborate justification. A better-informed citizenry makes better collective decisions. Turkey is a society often depicted as languishing in the middle income with governments hard pressed to take the structural measures that would help raise per capita income from the \$10,000 mark where it lingers. Turkish politicians speak of their country as becoming one of the 10 largest world economies without always setting out a roadmap to that destination. However, better education, improvement of human resources, and greater transparency as well as government accountability are often listed as a vital first steps. Less often is the case made that a pre-condition for all these reforms is a more responsive and responsible media.

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# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Don Podesta and Mark Nelson of the Center for International Media Assistance for suggesting the theoretical framework of this essay. This work was influenced by initial research I conducted at the National Endowment for Democracy in 2005 as a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow and I remain appreciative of that opportunity. I thank İzak Atiyas of Sabancı University for his advice on how to reapply the notion of caption in the present context. And I am more than grateful to my colleagues at P24 who provide a constant stream of encouragement, friendship and sound advice.
- <sup>2</sup> Typically, regulatory agencies restrict market entry, preserving quasi-monopolies in industries as diverse as civil aeronautics, trucking or banking according to George J. Stigler "The Theory of Economic Regulation" *The Bell Journal of Economics and Management Science* Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring, 1971), pp. 3–21
- <sup>3</sup> The definition provided by U4, the (Norwegian) Anti-Corruption Resource Centre refers to "a phenomenon in which outside interests (often the private sector, mafia networks, etc.) are able to bend state laws, policies and regulations to their (mainly financial) benefit through corrupt transactions with public officers and politicians." <http://www.u4.no/glossary/>
- <sup>4</sup> Articles 26–32 of the Turkish Constitution set out in detail freedoms of the especially article 28 which reads "The press is free, and shall not be censored." These freedoms are modified by the need to protect national security, subject to the decision of a court.
- <sup>5</sup> Vicente Riva Palacio, "The Ties that Bind the Press and PRI," in W.A. Orme Jr. (ed) *A Culture of Collusion: An Inside Look at the Mexican Press*, Boulder; Lynne Reiner 1997, quoted by Duncan McCargo, *Media and Politics in Pacific Asia*, Routledge Curzon, London 2003 p.9
- <sup>6</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz "The Media and the Crisis; an Information Theoretic Approach" in Anya Schiffrin, *Bad News: How America's Business Press Missed the Story of the Century*. New York: New Press, 2011. p.28 (The reasons he suggests are various—from the desire to maintain access to sources to the concern not to be responsible for causing panic). Also see the introduction.
- <sup>7</sup> "Journalism in the Digital Age" [http://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs201/projects/2010-11/Journalism/index7f0d.html?page\\_id=16](http://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs201/projects/2010-11/Journalism/index7f0d.html?page_id=16)
- <sup>8</sup> Elsewhere I argue that readers acquire the skills to "read" their own media—i.e. to compensate for bias and veracity. "Why Turkish Newspapers Sometimes Lie," in *Writing Turkey, Now and Then*, Gerald MacLane (ed) Middlesex University Press, publication Nov, 2006
- <sup>9</sup> Schiffrin, Anya. "The U.S. Press and the Financial Crisis." In *Bad News: How America's Business Press Missed the Story of the Century*. New York: New Press, 2011. p.3
- <sup>10</sup> Leyla Bolton, "Consolidation Likely Next Year," *Financial Times* November 20, 2000
- <sup>11</sup> "What surprised me much more than the recommendations of the prime minister to pay attention to the line between the people's right to know and to allow PKK propaganda' was the shared sense of volunteering for self-censorship among my colleagues," wrote the paper's deputy editor Yasemin Çongar, quoted in translation by Yavuz Baydar, *The Newsroom as an Open Air Prison: Corruption and Self-Censorship in Turkish Journalism*, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy Discussion Paper Series #D-91, February 2015 p.39. (For the original Turkish see *Taraf*, October 21, 2011 or <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/yazilar/yasemin-congar/milli-gazetecilik-ve-gayrimill-i-hislerim/18256/>)
- <sup>12</sup> In English see Baydar ibid. pp. 38–41, *Persona Non Grata* directed by Tuluhan Tekelioğlu. Produced by Platform24, Istanbul, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5OZqMkSAls>, Sibel Oral Toprağın Öptüğü Çocukla Can Yayınevi, 2015
- <sup>13</sup> <https://cpi.org/imprisoned/2013.php>
- <sup>14</sup> The subject of a recent documentary *Persona Non Grata: Tekelioğlu op. cit.*
- <sup>15</sup> Freedom of the Press 2015, Freedom House Washington 2015 p. 14. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FreedomofthePress\\_2015\\_FINAL.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FreedomofthePress_2015_FINAL.pdf)
- <sup>16</sup> "Turkey grave offender but part of global trend" <http://platform24.org/en/articles/271/turkey-grave-offender-but-part-of-global-trend>. Yavuz Baydar, *op. cit.*, provides a telling anecdote about the aftermath of the Freedom House Report. "Gönül Tol, a Washington-based Turkish pundit, writing regular columns for the staunchly pro-government daily, *Akşam*, decided to conduct an interesting test..." She wrote to argue that the report could be criticized but that the hate campaign it provoked and the ad hominem attack against the director of Freedom House's Jewish ethnicity was unacceptable. "'Let's test the report,' she concluded: 'If this column is published as it is, without being blocked by the editor, press freedom in Turkey could be freer than what the Freedom House report suggested.'" *Akşam* refused to publish the piece and she had to hand in her resignation a few days later.
- <sup>17</sup> My take on this process is in Andrew Finkel, Turkey: *What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, New York 2012 pp. 50–56.
- <sup>18</sup> Samia Nakhoul and Nick Tattersal "Turkish PM says tapes of talk with son a fabrication" <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/02/25/uk-turkey-erdogan-idUKBREA1N1ZS20140225>
- <sup>19</sup> Even printers ink was in short supply according to one editor-in-chief from that era (interview, Istanbul, June 2015) but said government's ability to control media through the allocation of scarce commodities should not be exaggerated. However, it was explained to me in first month working on a Turkish paper in 1989 that the reason my media group had declared open war on Turgut Özal, in the final days of his prime ministry, was because his government had removed the state subsidy on newsprint.
- <sup>20</sup> Hugh Pope "Media: Turkish Newspaper War Goes by the Book—Millions of Them: Frantic media titans offer everything from encyclopedias to chocolate pudding to woo readers" *Los Angeles Times*, March 30 1993 [http://articles.latimes.com/1993-03-30/news/wr-17070\\_1\\_chocolate-pudding](http://articles.latimes.com/1993-03-30/news/wr-17070_1_chocolate-pudding)
- <sup>21</sup> Cemal Kalyoncu, "Bir medya patronunun ibretlik hikâyesi [a media proprietor's sorry tale]" *Aksiyon* 15 October, 2007 [http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/kapak/bir-medya-patronunun-ibretlik-hikayesi\\_516995](http://www.aksiyon.com.tr/kapak/bir-medya-patronunun-ibretlik-hikayesi_516995) (The *Akşam* stable of writers included İlhami Soysal, Çetin Altan and Aziz Nesin)
- <sup>22</sup> Interview, Istanbul, May, 2001.
- <sup>23</sup> See "Why Turkish Newspapers Sometimes Lie".
- <sup>24</sup> Members of the Uzan family were convicted for defrauding Motorola of a \$2 billion by the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) courts of New York.
- <sup>25</sup> The first Turkish newspaper I worked for in 1989 survived on a front-page ad from the state mining bank Etibank. The paper collapsed when that ad was withdrawn to show government displeasure with the parent group's editorial policy. By 1998 the parent group's proprietor had become co-owner of the bank itself.
- <sup>26</sup> See below. The owner of Sabah, Dinç Bilgin, described the situation in an interview some 15 years after the fact. "There was great competition between the Hürriyet and Sabah Groups. We battled each other with promotional giveaways. If they gave a saucepan, we gave one; they gave a television we gave one. It reached the point where they had their prime minister and we had ours. Hürriyet supported Mesut Yılmaz and we supported Tansu Çiller [my translation]. Neşe Düzel, "Bu Ülkede Basın Hükümet de Kurdu [In this country, the press even formed the government]," *Taraf* 8 March, 2010. <http://arsiv.taraf.com.tr/yazilar/nese-duzel/bu-ulkede-basin-hukümet-de-kurdu/10345/>

- <sup>27</sup> From an interview in Taraf newspaper quoted in translation by Yavuz Baydar in "Diñç Bilgin speaks out," *Today's Zaman*, March 10 2010, [http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/yavuz-baydar/dinc-bilgin-speaks-out\\_203851.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/yavuz-baydar/dinc-bilgin-speaks-out_203851.html)
- <sup>28</sup> The Republican People's Party (CHP), though a party of the old guard, were lucky in the perverse sense that they had not managed to clear the 10 percent threshold in the 1999 general election and were thus not implicated in the public mind with the crisis.
- <sup>29</sup> Mehul Srivastava Benjamin Harvey Ercan Ersoy, "Erdoğan's Media Grab Stymies Expansion by Murdoch, Time Warner" Bloomberg March 3, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-03-03/erdogan-thwarts-murdoch-as-graft-probe-reveals-turkey-media-grab>
- <sup>30</sup> Pınar Tremblay, "Media mogul declares his (masculine love) to Erdoğan" *al-Monitor*, May 22, 2015 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/turkey-media-mogul-declares-his-masculine-love-to-erdogan.html>
- <sup>31</sup> See my "Islamic Bank under Pressure as State Businesses Withdraw Funds" *Financial Times* November 28, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/19c5a3fa-4ef3-11e4-a1ef-00144feab7de.html>
- <sup>32</sup> Widely reported in the Turkish press (March 21, 2013).
- <sup>33</sup> Analysed by Doğan Akin, "Many Birds with One Stone." Platform24.org, March 29 2014 <http://platform24.org/en/articles/202/many-birds-one-stone> The original quotation comes from Cengiz Özdemir, "Yeni TRT" *Aksam* September 22, 2014 <http://www.aksam.com.tr/yazarlar/yeni-trt/haber-340547>
- <sup>34</sup> Interview, Istanbul November 2013. The same individual reacted indignantly at the suggestion that senior government figures ever lifted the phone to dictate his own newspaper's policy. In March the following year, a taped conversation between himself and the prime minister was leaked in which he was told to fire a columnist who had become increasingly critical of the AKP government. He was later to describe Erdoğan's words ("time to say goodbye and let him go somewhere else") as simply a "recommendation."
- <sup>35</sup> A key incident in the Media Association's creation was the failure of the Press Council to protest the refusal in March, 2009 by the Turkish military to provide transport for a correspondent away from the snowy isolated mountain spot where a politician had died in a helicopter crash. This exposed reporter to some danger, but was in keeping with the chiefs of staff policy to deny any form of access to reporters from *Zaman* newspaper and its associated Cihan News Agency because of its close connections with the religious movement associated with the cleric, Fethullah Gülen. Interview, Istanbul June 11, 2015. See also <http://www.postmedya.com/polemik/oktay-eksiden-ekrem-dumanliya-h11331.html>
- <sup>36</sup> See my "How a How a History Magazine Fell Victim to Self-Censorship" in *Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media and Power in Turkey* Freedom House, Washington 2014 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/democracy-crisis-corruption-media-and-power-turkey/how-history-magazine-fell-victim-self>
- <sup>37</sup> Izzy Finkel "Istanbul Protest is—and is not—about Trees" [http://www.salon.com/2013/06/05/no\\_this\\_is\\_not\\_just\\_an\\_environmental\\_protest/](http://www.salon.com/2013/06/05/no_this_is_not_just_an_environmental_protest/)
- <sup>38</sup> Yavuz Baydar "The Newsroom as an Open Air Prison: Corruption and Self-censorship in Turkish Journalism" prepared for the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, Kennedy School Harvard University, Boston 2015 pp 28–33 <http://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Turkish-Journalism-Yavuz-Baydar.pdf> Appendix I provides a gripping timeline of how Gezi frightened the government into tightening the screws on dissent.
- <sup>39</sup> The subject of a recent documentary *Persona Non Grata* directed by Tuluhan Tekelioğlu, Produced by Platform24, Istanbul, 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5OZqMkSAIs>
- <sup>40</sup> Baydar op. cit. pp. 59–63
- <sup>41</sup> Press release 29 June, 2013 <http://www.medyadernegi.org/basin-aciklamasi-29-haziran-2013/> [my translation]
- <sup>42</sup> See my "Who Guards the Turkish Press? A Perspective on Press Corruption" *Journal of International Affairs* vol. 52 no.1 Columbia University, Fall 2000 pp. 147–166
- <sup>43</sup> A shortcut to that debate is not just the recently produced New York Times Innovation Report but the controversy that <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mylestanzer/exclusive-times-internal-report-painted-dire-digital-picture#.iq3RekPPr>
- <sup>44</sup> For an example of a local newspaper trying to defy that pressure, see Noah Blaser, "For Kurdish journo, elections a soapbox for press freedom," <http://platform24.org/en/objective/292/for-kurdish-journo-elections-a-soapbox-for-press-freedom>.
- <sup>45</sup> The pro-government Star newspaper notoriously photoshopped a pictured of the recently elected President Erdoğan addressing the UN national assembly, to show a hall packed to the brim when in reality it was practically empty—an event parodied on the online news portals, showing the president "virtually" addressing a rock concert or a throng along the Copacabana beach. T24.com "Star, Erdoğan konuşurken boş kalan BM salonunu Photoshop'la doldurdu!" September 25, 20015 <http://t24.com.tr/haber/star-erdogan-konusurken-bos-kalan-bm-salonunu-photoshopla-doldurdu.271811>
- <sup>46</sup> See Peter Pomerantsev, "Inside the Kremlin's Hall Mirrors" *The Guardian*, April 9, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/09/kremlin-hall-of-mirrors-military-information-psychology>
- <sup>47</sup> The pretext was a legal action to protect a Black Sea housewife whose reputation was being besmirched by a false Twitter account in her name.
- <sup>48</sup> Constanze Letsch, "Turkey Twitter users flout Erdoğan ban on micro-blogging site" *The Guardian* March 21, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/21/turkey-twitter-users-flout-ban-erdogan>
- <sup>49</sup> Zeynep Tüfekci "Everyone Is Getting Turkey's Twitter Block Wrong" *The Message* March 23, 2014 <https://medium.com/message/everyone-is-getting-turkeys-twitter-block-wrong-cb596ce5f27>
- <sup>50</sup> For example, see "Turkey's Erdoğan accuses New York Times of meddling in country's affairs," *The Guardian*, May 26, 2015 <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a3a6bb2e-d82d-11e2-9495-00144feab7de.html>; or Daniel Dombey, "Erdoğan attacks 'traitors' and foreign media for Turkey protests" *Financial Times*, June 18, 2013
- <sup>51</sup> *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 10, 2015 <http://www.hurriyettailynews.com/turkish-tv-stations-air-44-hours-of-live-erdogan-speeches-in-one-week-report.aspx> Television remains by far the most effective medium in Turkey with 84 percent of the population (in 2014) watching everyday compared to the 18 percent who read a newspaper During the campaign the AKP and its leader Ahmet Davutoğlu appeared in 55,728 televised news pieces. The CHP and its leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu trailed with 23,542 pieces. The president, Tayyip Erdoğan appeared in 27,882 TV news pieces from April 1 to June 6, according to research carried out by the IPSOS organization. <http://www.hurriyettailynews.com/and-the-winner-of-turkeys-upcoming-election-is.aspx>.
- <sup>52</sup> Among the more ludicrous examples is the interview *Takvim* newspaper published on 14 June 2013 with the CNN journalist Christiane Amanpour in which she confessed that the networks coverage of violent demonstrations in Gezi Park had been falsified under pressure from special interests that including finance houses and alcoholic beverage producers. As proof of the authenticity of the interview a huge photograph of the reporter appeared on the newspaper's front page by the entrance to CNN Center in Atlanta, his visitor's pass magnified with an inset zoom. It was only after turning to an inside page the reader was informed that the while the interview *should* have been true, it was not in fact true.

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