

Watchdogs or Lapdogs?

Concentration of Ownership in Turkish Media

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To Hilde and Henrik.

Table of contents

List of tables.....	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Note on spelling and pronunciation.....	vii
Preface	viii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
1.1. Two dominant perspectives	4
1.2. Problem and hypothesis.....	5
1.3. The age of conglomerates.....	7
1.4. Effects of ownership concentration.....	8
1.5. De-westernising media studies.....	9
1.6. Sources.....	9
1.7. Structure and organisation	10
Chapter II: History of the Turkish media.....	11
2.1. From the ruins of an empire.....	11
2.2. History of modern Turkish media.....	12
2.2.1. 1918-1946: Rise and decline of the Republican Press.....	12
2.2.2. 1946-1980: Challenges to state control.....	14
2.2.3. 1980-2006: Conglomeration and sensationalism	16
Chapter III: Ownership in Turkish media	18
3.1. Market size.....	18
3.2. The Turkish holding company	21
3.3. Profile of the Doğan Group	22
3.3.1. Prospects for profitability.....	26
3.4. Other major players	27
3.4.1. The Ciner Group.....	28
3.4.2. The Çukurova Group	28
3.5. Midsize groups	29
3.5.1. The Uzan Group	29
3.5.2. The İhlas Group.....	30

3.5.3.	The Doğuş Group	31
3.5.4.	The Samanyolu Group	31
3.5.5.	The Aksoy Group	32
3.6.	Relative strength.....	32
Chapter IV:	Trade-off.....	36
4.1.	Trade-off in theory	37
4.2.	The legacy of the 1980 coup.....	38
4.3.	Economic liberalism the Turkish way.....	38
4.4.	Cases.....	40
4.4.1.	Subsidies	41
4.4.2.	Preferred reporters	42
4.4.3.	Erdogan and the <i>AKP</i>	44
4.4.4.	Direct links	48
4.4.5.	Government tenders.....	49
4.5.	Journalistic professionalism.....	50
4.6.	Concluding remarks	53
Chapter V:	Political weapon.....	54
5.1.	Content control.....	56
5.1.1	Case: Aydın Doğan's involvement in politics.....	57
5.1.1.1.	Çiller vs Doğan	59
5.1.1.2.	Tantan vs Doğan.....	62
5.1.1.3.	Ilıcak vs Doğan	63
5.1.1.4.	Doğan's agenda.....	65
5.2.	Agenda control.....	66
5.2.1.	Old taboos	67
5.2.2.	New taboos.....	70
5.3.	Fighting each other.....	73
5.4.	Fighting together	75
5.5.	Concluding remarks	77
Chapter VI:	Restraints on civil society	78
6.1.	The rise and decline of trade unions.....	80

6.2.	Squeezed out	82
6.2.1.	Fire at will	83
6.2.2.	Thoughts on EU membership.....	86
6.3.	Human rights.....	89
6.3.1.	The deep state	89
6.3.2.	Fighting human rights defenders	93
6.4.	Concluding remarks	95
Chapter VII: Conclusion		96
Bibliography		101
List of interviews.....		109

List of tables

<i>Number</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. Population and GDP (in USD).....	18
2. Average circulation of daily newspapers 2000-2004 (in thousands).....	19
3. Advertising revenues for daily newspapers 2000-2004 (in USD million).....	20
4. Contribution to newspapers' revenues (%)	20
5. Doğan Holding.....	23
6. <i>Doğan Yayın Holding</i>	24
7. Share of revenues in Doğan Holding (in USD millions).....	24
8. Share of operating profit in Doğan Holding (in USD millions)	25
9. Broadcasting market (%).....	33
10. Circulation newspapers (%).....	34
11. Audience shares of main channels (%) 2002-2004.....	34
12. Advertising shares (%)	35
13. Circulation and ownership of main daily newspapers	35

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The conclusions and eventual mistakes are the responsibility of the author alone.

Note on spelling and pronunciation

Modern Turkish uses the Latin alphabet, modified to ensure that there is a separate letter for each main sound. The spelling thus aims at phonetic consistency. The descriptions given below are approximate and non-technical.

c is pronounced as *j* in *John* and *joy*.

ç is pronounced as *ch* in *church* and *chair*.

ğ is silent, but lengthens the preceding vowel.

ı is pronounced something like the second syllable of *rhythm*, or the *u* in *radium*.

ö is pronounced as the German *ö* in *öffnen* and *könig*.

ş is pronounced as *sh* in *ship* and *shut*.

ü is pronounced like *ü* in the German *schützen*.

Preface

“Our mass media are a vital element in the way we live our lives and come to know ourselves and our world. They contain our memories and our histories; their resources provide for the stories people tell each other.” (Street 2001:276)

This thesis is concerned with concentration of ownership in Turkish media. My focus on ownership is due to a personal interest in the matter, the ongoing academic and popular debate on the issue and the fact that several Turkish journalists and media scholars I have spoken to generally believe this is the most interesting field of study regarding contemporary Turkish media. I have personally worked as a reporter in three conglomerate owned newspapers in Norway. The Norwegian conglomerate *Orkla* acquired one of them, a local newspaper called *Østlendingen*, when I was a reporter there in the late 1990s. It was the first time I was exposed to discussions of the pros and cons of conglomerate media ownership. There was a lot of heated debate at the time. Journalists tended to be opposed to the deal, managers and editors in favour. I have also worked six years for the major national daily *Aftenposten*, owned by the largest media conglomerate in Norway, *Schibsted*.

I cannot point to a single incident that shaped my curiosity and concern towards conglomerate media ownership. Through my general experiences as a reporter I have come to the conclusion that the question of who controls the main channels of information in a given society is of immense importance, because it touches upon the basic of human coexistence: communication. The people who control our means to communicate on a macro level, are by default in a position where they can exert undue influence. I am not implying that all media owners have bad intentions. Most of them are in the business out of interest and a desire to make money. But there are examples of media owners that have used their power for personal political gain, or to influence political decision making in an undemocratic fashion. The nature of private media ownership with its limited level of transparency is to me a major concern that calls for serious and constant political considerations. The free market is not synonymous with pluralism – the relationship is often characterised by antagonism. I believe that media outlets – at least those that are not concerned only with entertainment – have a special societal value that sets them apart from ordinary consumer items, and that these media outlets thus cannot be regulated solely as commodities on equal terms with refrigerators and cars. Society, and I use this term in its widest sense, has a special obligation to secure that this

special societal value is defended. I am not in any way glorifying the institution of public broadcasting. History has shown us that complete state control over the media can be as dangerous as unchecked private ownership. My personal vision is a mix of the best of both worlds, combined with a high level of transparency and an effective regime of checks and balances to curb undue political influence.

Chapter I: Introduction

Mehmet T. Sucu is sitting behind a worn-out desk in a cramped and smoky office in the *Cumhuriyet* (Republic) building in Istanbul's traditional press district, Cağaloğlu.¹ For centuries this was just a stone's throw away from the nerve centres of political activity in the once mighty Ottoman Empire. Today the *Topkapı Sarayı* and the Sublime Porte, the buildings that used to house the governments of what was once arguably the most powerful state on earth, are among Istanbul's major tourist attractions. The area is filled with activity 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When most other newspapers moved to modern high-rise buildings in the outskirts of Istanbul in the 1980s and 1990s, the venerable *Cumhuriyet* stayed loyal to the noisy and cramped streets of sprawling Cağaloğlu.

To emphasize the historic importance of the area Sucu points out the window to the next-door building, a ramshackle wooden house: "*That used to be the headquarters of the CUP*", he says, before he turns around and points to an old desk in the neighbouring room: "*and that used to be Enver Pasha's desk.*"² The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), part of the Young Turk Movement, ruled the Ottoman Empire during its last tumultuous years, and Enver Pasha was one of the party's strongmen. The old wooden building also housed the first editorial offices of *Cumhuriyet*, launched in 1924 as the standard-bearer of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's revolution. But what Sucu does not tell us is that an Armenian merchant owned the building before the CUP turned it into their headquarters. The house is thus a symbol of three overlapping periods in Turkish history: the multiethnic past, the bloody curtain fall of the Ottoman Empire when most minority groups were either forced to flee or killed, and the implementation of a new and arguably exclusionary Turkish nationalism after World War I.

Sucu began working in *Cumhuriyet* after his friend and famous *Cumhuriyet* reporter Uğur Mumcu was killed by radical Islamists in a car bomb in Ankara on 27 January 1993.³ As editor-in-chief the good humoured Sucu likes to have a say in most minor and major decisions regarding the making of the paper. During our interview he is often looking at the layout of freshly produced pages. He has a three-day beard, the greying hair is somewhat untidy, and he

¹ The area is also known as Babiali.

² Mehmet T. Sucu, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

³ Uğur Mumcu had reported extensively on the connections of Turkish Islamic fundamentalists with Iran and Saudi Arabia. The murder of Mumcu, who Zürcher (2004:290-291) describes as Turkey's most famous journalist at the time, was instrumental in forming the hardened attitudes against Turkish Islamists that resulted in the general wave of suppression of Islamic currents, both moderate and radical, which was initiated in 1997.

speaks fast with energetic gestures. In one hand he constantly holds a cigarette, the other alternates between a portable phone and a cup of strong Turkish tea. Watching his appearance vivid images of the prototype old school editor caricatured in so many Hollywood movies springs to mind. And this is an image Sucu is clearly comfortable with. To him something went terribly wrong with Turkish journalism after the other newspapers moved from the city to the guarded media fortresses in suburban Güneşli and İkitelli. In one of his many anecdotes he invites me to understand the reasons for his grievances. In the late 1990s he was offered a job as editor in *Hürriyet* (Freedom). With an average circulation of more than half a million copies, the mainstream *Hürriyet* is almost ten times bigger than the leftist intellectual *Cumhuriyet*. Being part of Turkey's biggest media conglomerate, the Doğan Group, *Hürriyet* also has a financial muscle that by far exceeds that of the struggling *Cumhuriyet*.

“I went to their new high-rise building in Güneşli. I entered the building, and had to go through a security check. The first I noticed was that you cannot open the windows! When I got to the right floor I saw some close friends, and I cried out to them. They told me to keep the noise down, and offered me tea. It was Lipton tea! Can you imagine that: Lipton tea”, he says, making a short pause just to underline the symbolic point that ordinary Turks don't drink imported “dishwater”, and that this is an example of what he believes is a widening social gap between mainstream reporters and the public they claim they serve.

“Then I wanted to smoke”, he continues. *“But I had to go to a smoking-room. A smoking-room! I had already made up my mind. I couldn't work at that place. But my friends told me to go and talk to the editor-in-chief. I talked to him, and told him I wanted to go back to Cağaloğlu. There I am free. I felt I was unable to breath in that building. “You are crazy”,* he said. *“We will offer you two or three times the salary you get in Cumhuriyet.”* But I had already made up my mind. *I wanted to work at a place where you are close to the people you write about, where you eat at the same cafes as them, and use the same public transport. I wanted to be close to the sources.”*

The contrast between the worn four-storey office building of *Cumhuriyet* and the posh high-rise *Hürriyet Medya Towers* is by all comparisons glaring. *Hürriyet* is situated in Güneşli, close to Istanbul's busy international airport, the *Atatürk Havalımanı*. If the traffic on the often chaotic *Tem Otoyolu* (Trans European Motorway) is moderate, it's about half-an-hours drive from central Istanbul. At the entrance to the facilities I am greeted by two armed guards,

one equipped with a machine gun. Two limousines are parked in front of the impressive marble stairs that leads into the building. Once inside you have to go through an airport-like security check before you are let into a big hall decorated with a fountain and statues of previous editors. The building has cafes, kiosks and vending machines that provide the employees with whatever they need for a day at the office. Few people eat their lunch outside in the somewhat ramshackle neighbourhood inhabited by a share of the millions of Turks who in the last decades have moved from the Anatolian countryside to a suburb in Istanbul, or *Gecekondu*, as many of them are called in Turkish.⁴

The news department has a semi-open landscape with lining walls the height of a man to separate the working desks. The environment is calm compared to the intense atmosphere in *Cumhuriyet* – more like a mainstream European news department. Editor Arif Dizdaroğlu tells me he misses the atmosphere of Cağaloğlu, where *Hürriyet* used to be situated, but he claims that it was impossible to build a modern news building with parking and printing facilities close by in that part of Istanbul. But there is clearly an element of melancholy in the jeans dressed middle-aged man's voice when he talks about the “good old days”.

*“We were in the daily life. We were in the streets. We could eat were people ate. We had the chance to see people. Now we are outside of the city. We are a thousand people working in the same building, but we don't see each other. We feel that we are isolated from the daily life. We don't use public buses. We don't use the vapur (public boats). We go with other services and cars. We have less contact with the people.”*⁵

Sucu and Dizdaroğlu in many ways represent the old and the new in the Turkish media sector. *Cumhuriyet*, founded as a mouthpiece for Atatürk's government a year after the Turkish Republic was established in 1923, is the oldest existing daily in Turkey today. It still carries some of the nation-building and socialist credentials and ideals of the Atatürk era. *Hürriyet* was founded in 1948, and grew to be a major newspaper during the first experiments with market liberalism in Turkey in the 1950s. Like most newspapers in Turkey today it is part of a major multiactivity conglomerate, while *Cumhuriyet* struggles to stay independent. A foundation controls 51 per cent of the holding company that owns *Cumhuriyet*, while the

⁴ *Gecekondu* literally means, “settled at night”. The word is used to refer to the squatter areas in Turkey's big cities. In the 1980s, over half the population of Turkey's major cities lived in such “irregular settlements”. In Istanbul approximately 70 per cent did so. (Buğra 1998:307)

⁵ Arif Dizdaroğlu, interview with author, Güneşli, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

remaining 49 per cent are owned by various investors, among them the owners of the two largest media conglomerates in Turkey, Aydın Doğan and Turgay Ciner.⁶ Doğan, Ciner and the other big league businessmen who have taken over Turkish media during the last 25 years, play the lead roles in this thesis.

1.1. Two dominant perspectives

Two dominant perspectives developed to investigate and explain the connections between media, political power and democratisation can be identified in the field of Media Studies. The first and oldest is defined by its focus on the media as a guardian against abuses by the state, and is in essence liberal in approach. The second, variably dubbed the critical political economy perspective, emerged in the 1970s as a critique of the dominant liberal media theory. Both perspectives were developed mainly by studying media in Britain and the US, and are consequently influenced by the broader social developments in these countries.

The principal role of the media according to liberal theory is to act as a check on the state. Private ownership in a free market is essential for fulfilling this role as a watchdog, and all ties with the state are by default suspect. The dominant critique of this perspective is that it doesn't take into account the exercise of economic authority by shareholders (Curran 2000:122). It also rejects the notion that the state in given circumstances can play a positive role in the development of media institutions. Another objection is that it fails to consider collusion between media owners and political elites based on social ties and shared interests. In other words: it fails to consider media owners as part of a broader system of power.

The critical political economy approach tends to portray market liberalism and political democracy as essentially antagonistic. Under the reign of the free market the control of the media has been concentrated in the hands of media owners and advertisers. This has in turn limited diversity and largely replaced political content with entertainment. One critique of this perspective is that it glosses over the state as a source of threat to media freedom. Lee (2000:124-125) argues that this neglect is particularly untenable when it comes to analysing authoritarian regimes. In countries with such regimes it gives little meaning to investigate private ownership structures if one doesn't take into account that they are under the tutelage of the state. Schudson (2000:178-179) argues that it is dangerous to downplay the repressive

⁶ Mehmet T. Sucu, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

potential of a state-centred media system. He claims that the absence of commercial organisations, or their total domination by the state, is the worst-case scenario.

What springs to mind if we sum up the critique of the two dominant perspectives is that any theoretical master perspective has to conceive of the media as being a check both on public and private power. In other words: A synthesis might be a more fruitful strategy than a twin burial of the theories. But the most important lesson is that a fresh canvas calls for a fresh brush. There are important differences between societies, and these differences need to be addressed if we are to develop reasoned understanding of media in a local, national or regional setting. My approach is inspired by the critical political economy perspective, but I will also focus on the uses and abuses of state power, because I believe that this is essential for understanding how the interaction between different societal forces have shaped the development of Turkish media. Following Lee's argument presented above, discussions on how the authoritarian character of the Turkish state has influenced the development of issues such as pluralism and private ownership in Turkey is a necessary ingredient in my analysis.

1.2. Problem and hypothesis

Two and a half newspapers are enough in Turkey, former president and premier Turgut Özal (1927-1993) argued in 1983 (Nozawa-Dursun 1997:19).⁷ Concentrated ownership in Turkish media gained momentum during Özal's premiership (1983-1989) and presidency (1989-1993). Today a handful of multiactivity conglomerates dominate the media market.

The small amount of research on and analyses of media in Turkey is generally concentrated on legislation that have restricted freedom of speech,⁸ an oppressive political environment and violence against and incarceration of journalists and academics.⁹ There has been little academic focus on ownership structures. During the fierce fighting between the Turkish Armed Forces and the Kurdish separatist guerrilla *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK; Kurdistan Workers Party)* in the mid 1990s, Turkey was regarded as one of the most oppressive countries in the world, regarding freedom of speech. Anyone who published articles the regime defined as promoting a separatist agenda, a threat to national security or a threat to the secular foundation of the state, risked prosecution and harsh prison sentences.

⁷ Turgut Özal headed the *Anavatan Partisi (ANAP; Motherland Party)*. He died in 1993 while still president.

⁸ The Turkish Press Council in 1995 identified 152 laws that limited press freedom (Çatalbaş 2000:143).

⁹ For some examples see: Human Rights Watch (1999); Helsinki Watch Committee (1986); Lawyers Committee for Human Rights & Crowley Program in International Human Rights (1999).

In connection with Turkey's bid to join the EU, the government has removed or relaxed many of the restrictive laws.¹⁰ The police still arbitrarily harass reporters, and it can still be dangerous to air certain political views,¹¹ but the legal groundwork done by the government has definitely expanded political rights and civil liberties.¹²

However, there is an inherent and troubling paradox to this development: one would assume that the relaxation of repressive legislation would at last cause political and ideological discussion to flourish in Turkish society. But this has, as a number of scholars and organisations have pointed out, not happened.¹³ The central question for discussion in this thesis is thus: why has liberalisation of repressive legislation in Turkey not produced more pluralism and diversity in the media?

My hypothesis is that concentration of ownership in Turkish media largely is to blame for the limited scope of political and ideological discussion in Turkey today. That ownership concentration in media creates dilemmas tied to concepts of pluralism and diversity is not an original argument in and of itself. But I claim that the consequences of such concentration are more serious and harmful in Turkey than in most Western countries because 1) the concept of a free media was not sufficiently ingrained in the political culture prior to the economic liberalisation, 2) the military junta that ruled in the early 1980s managed to limit the ideological scope of the Turkish political field and civil society to such an extent that the Turkish citizenry became virtually depoliticised, 3) effective checks and balances to curb the influence of media owners and restrict the ties between owners and government officials are not established, 4) the Turkish media market is very small compared with Western markets, and it cannot support a wide range of publications, 5) the media business is not self-sustainable, and most media companies are thus financially dependent upon their mother companies to survive.

¹⁰ For analyses of the legal changes, see: Çatalbaş 2005:12-15; Commission of the European Communities 2004:36-42.

¹¹ According to Reporters Without Borders 39 journalists were arrested and 14 physically attacked during 2004. In addition five media organisations were censored by the state. Reporters Without Borders (2005): *Turkey – 2005 Annual Report*. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=13450&var_recherche=Turkey (19.10.2005)

¹² Turkey has since 2001 steadily improved its political rights and civil liberties standing in various surveys. See: Freedom House (2003): *Annual Freedom in the World Country Scores, 1972 through 2003*. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/allscore04.xls> (26.05.2005); Reporters Without Borders (2005): *Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2005*. http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/CM_2005_Eu_Eng.pdf (05.04.2006)

¹³ For examples, see: Tunç 2004:5; Open Society Institute 2005:1594-1595; Freedom House (2005): *Freedom of the Press 2005*. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/pressurvey/pfs2005.pdf> (26.05.2005)

From these explanations I have derived three arguments from which I will organise my analysis. The first one asks what the motivations behind and the desired outcome of the liberalising policies were. My hypothesis is that the political elite had no intention of jeopardising their control of the flow of information, but instead concluded that a new ideological toolbox gave them new opportunities. Consequently they gave certain privileges to some media players as a more or less implicit trade-off to guarantee obedience. The second argument attempts to explain why otherwise successful businessmen make large investments in a sector that has been unprofitable for a long time. What benefits do they derive from their media outlets? My hypothesis is that they use them to put pressure on the political leadership and to promote their other businesses. The third argument investigates the role of civil society in Turkey, with a focus on the role of trade unions in the media sector and human rights organisations. My hypothesis is that powerful elements in the political and the economic elites have a common interest in imposing serious restraints on civil movements, although their motives might diverge.

1.3. The age of conglomerates

The drive towards concentration of ownership has been strong in most liberal democratic societies during the last century. Many scholars claim that this trend shot ahead with the ascendance of the New Right,¹⁴ whose ideas became influential, especially in Great Britain and the US, in the late 1970s (McChesney 2000:296-297; Street 2001:240-241). For the New Right theorists the free market is deemed to be the only appropriate mechanism for determining media content, and their line of thought has led to deregulation of cross-media ownership restrictions and public service obligations. Many studies of media policy in the West argue that these policies in practice are irreversible because the giant conglomerates that now dominate the media market have become too powerful (McChesney 2000:125-126; Bagdikian 2004:257-259; Doyle 2002:105-121). Trans-national companies like News Corporation, AOL Time Warner, Disney and Bertelsmann have annual revenues exceeding national budgets in small countries,¹⁵ and this financial muscle, combined with control over important channels of information, have created a situation where the media elites actually wield considerable influence over democratic institutions. A textbook example is provided by

¹⁴ Often used interchangeably with neoliberalism and economic rationalism. The eponymous terms Thatcherism and Reagenism also to some degree apply to the same phenomenon.

¹⁵ AOL Time Warner, the biggest media conglomerate in the world, earned revenues totalling USD 42,1 billion in 2004. Press release from Time Warner: <http://ir.timewarner.com/downloads/4Q04earnings.pdf> (19.05.2005)

Silvio Berlusconi's rise to power on the back of his television and press empire in the Italian elections in 1994 and 2001. Among the scholars referred above there is a growing concern that mainstream media, in principal speeches presented as defenders of civil society, democracy and pluralism, actually work as conservative and undemocratic forces in many parts of the world today. The giant media corporations have a big stake in encouraging and preserving a free and globalised market, and have therefore almost by default become political players while hiding behind a façade of neutrality and objectivity.

1.4. Effects of ownership concentration

Following the division between the adherents of the liberal and the critical political economy perspective outlined above, we can safely say that there is no universal agreement among media scholars on how concentrated ownership affects media diversity. McChesney (2000; 2004) believes that the negative effects of concentration on pluralism and democracy by far outweigh the economic gains created by synergy and scale advantages. Doyle (2002:12) agrees with him to a certain extent. Her analysis is developed along two different lines of inquiry: diversity of output and diversity of ownership. These are both related to the concept of pluralism, but there is no guarantee that diversity of ownership will produce diversity of output, although this is more likely than that concentrated ownership will lead to diversity. She also argues that the amount of output is not necessarily linked to pluralism because it is better to have two channels with different programming than twenty with the same. Doyle (2002:20) uses the case of Berlusconi and his media conglomerate to provide “compelling evidence of a causal connection between concentrated media ownership and an undesirable narrowing in the diversity of political opinions available to the public via the media”. Mara Einstein (2004) concludes in her study of television output in the US that concentration of ownership has not reduced diversity, but actually to some extent increased it. The problem is that this increase has created “fragmented audiences that limits itself to watching only the kinds of programs that it likes – not necessarily what would serve a democracy” (2004:4).

Another effect of ownership concentration is the immense growth of commercially driven conglomerates and the accompanying financial power of these firms. This has implications for media output and diversity when it is more profitable for these conglomerates to reduce or streamline output than to invest in diversity. But it can also have wider implications for pluralism if owners use their outlets for personal political gain. The most obvious example is Berlusconi, but the media mogul Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Corporation, has also been

widely accused of using his global media empire to promote a particular political ideology and its representatives. But these are as Street (2001:133-139) has shown allegations that are difficult to prove, because it attributes a political motive to Murdoch. It suggests that he has a reason for influencing his media outlets that may conflict or coincide with his commercial interests. If we measure Murdoch by the amount of commercial success he has achieved, it is conceivable that his commercial interests override everything else.¹⁶ But more important than isolated examples of media moguls riding to prominence on the back of their media empires, is the long term influence and effect of an ideologically uniform media. If we for the sake of the argument assume that media owners have a large say in the editorial policies of their outlets, and that they use this power to subtly promote a one-dimensional ideological outlook, we have a less transparent and arguably more dangerous situation.

1.5. De-westernising media studies

Studies of media ownership and media in general have tended to focus on outlets in a handful of Western countries. The theoretical framework that has been developed is consequently based on media institutions that operate in a liberal environment. With the recent academic interest in globalisation this framework has been challenged. Scholars like Downing (1996) and Sparks (1998) have both called for “communication theorizing to develop itself comparatively” (Downing 1996:xi). The rationale behind this approach is that the evidence derived from studies of media in societies that are politically relatively homogeneous is not representative of the world. This critique combined with increasing interest in developing theories to explain the causes and effects of globalisation cleared the ground for studies of the role of media in a number of countries. The book “*De-westernising Media Studies*” (2000), with contributions from scholars from a wide range of countries and continents, is but one example of this trend. The editors of the book, James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (2000:5), believe that contributions from “area studies” are vital for developing comparative studies that can shed new light on media theories. They argue that local knowledge is crucial if we are to understand how media interacts with local culture and power structures.

1.6. Sources

This study is concerned with the contemporary situation of conglomerate media in Turkey, and the amount of authoritative academic sources available is limited. A few studies on the

¹⁶ Street’s argument is not directly applicable to Turkey because most Turkish media outlets run at a loss.

subject by Turkish scholars and experts have recently been published in Turkish, but to my knowledge there exists no extensive and authoritative study published in English. Initially this was an obstacle, but I overcame it by improving my Turkish skills during the process. The research in this thesis is still to a large degree based on newspaper and magazine articles, both in Turkish and English, reports from various Turkish and international organisations, and interviews and informal discussions with Turkish media scholars, editors, reporters and trade union leaders. Most of the newspaper and magazine articles are collected from the Internet-sites of the publications in question, a list of which are presented in the bibliography. To fill in the blanks left from scarce material of scholarly work, I have reserved ample space for my interviews. They will be duly presented in a suiting context in the following chapters. The interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Istanbul in January, June and July 2005. The choice of Istanbul as site of my fieldwork is due to the fact that the city is the undisputed centre of Turkish media activity, a status it has enjoyed almost uninterrupted since the first Turkish newspapers saw the light of day in the early 19th century.

My work draws heavily on authoritative studies on Turkey from various academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, political economy and political science. Due to the lack of written sources on corporate Turkish media this was an absolute necessity if I was to provide a proper context for my own analysis and findings. The multiactivity nature of the conglomerates in question, the various ethnic and religious conflicts that have influenced the course of political rights and civil liberties in Turkey, and the history of state-business relations in the country are all aspects that are important in my analysis. Drawing on work from many disciplines has made it possible to provide some conclusions that may have wider societal reach than the ones provided from more discipline-loyal media studies.

1.7. Structure and organisation

This study consists of seven chapters, loosely organised in two parts separating the background material and the analysis. The first part consists of two chapters in addition to the introduction, while the second part consists of three chapters and a final conclusion. In chapter two I chronicle the rise of the modern Turkish media after World War I. The third chapter provides an up-to-date insight into who-owns-what in the Turkish media industry. It also provides an insight into how the major conglomerates in general organise their businesses and a discussion of the size and wealth of the Turkish economy and media market. Part two consists of three chapters based on the three arguments I introduced in paragraph 1.2.

Chapter II: History of the Turkish media

Discontinuity due to frequently fluctuating political, judicial and economic circumstances has influenced the development of privately owned media in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey since the first newspaper, *Takvim-i Vakayi* (Calendar of Events), was launched in 1831.

Almost none of the newspapers that were launched in Turkey before World War II have survived. Western Europe and the US are characterised by the opposite: almost no major new newspaper has been launched successfully after World War I. The Turkish economy has been a roller coaster ride where rapid growth and heavy meltdowns have followed in each other's footsteps in a seemingly endless cycle. Inflation has often been in the high double-digit range. A number of ineffective minority governments, four military coups (1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997)¹ and a judicial branch that at times has been heavily politicised have created an unstable environment for business, investors and consumers alike. In this chapter I will give a brief historical background and chronicle the rise of modern media in Turkey.

2.1. From the ruins of an empire

The defeat in World War I caused the end of the once mighty Ottoman Empire. After ten years of almost continuous warfare the areas that now form modern Turkey was "depopulated, impoverished and in ruins to a degree almost unparalleled in modern history" (Zürcher 2004:163).² The emigration of Greeks and Armenians, who had constituted the large majority of entrepreneurs and managers, left the area almost without highly skilled personnel. One of the main objectives of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's regime was consequently to support the rise of an indigenous industrial elite that would work in tandem with the government to build a strong and state-led economy, and a strong middle class that would engage in commerce and support the new economy. As Buğra (1994) has shown this was a long-term project that demanded commitment from both sides, and it was only partly successful in the first decades. It was not until the 1950s that something resembling an independent industrial elite and a bourgeoisie were strong enough to take initiative. The central role of the state in the development and the fragile and unstable economy did to a large degree make the economic elite dependent upon the political elite. This has as Aydın (2005) and Buğra (1994) have shown left a lasting impression on the relationship between these groups. The economic

¹ The bloodless ouster of Necmettin Erbakan's government in 1997 is popularly dubbed a "post-modern coup".

² According to Zürcher (2004:163), some 2,5 million Anatolian Muslims, between 600 000 and 800 000 Armenians and up to 300 000 Greeks died during World War I and the War of Liberation (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*). The population of Anatolia declined by 20 per cent through mortality, a percentage 20 times as high as that of France during World War I.

elite has seldom taken initiatives on their own behalf, but waited until the state has acted. The development of privately owned media has more or less followed the general pattern of business development in Turkey. This will be analysed in detail in chapter three.

2.2. History of modern Turkish media

It was not until the late 19th century that newspapers emerged as vehicles of social debate and change that had any real impact on social and political life in the Ottoman Empire. If we measure by circulation, the reach of the written word was largely confined to the upper classes and the influential urban intelligentsia.³ The emergence of modern journalism in Turkey largely coincides with the Young Ottoman Movement, a group of Turkish intellectual revolutionaries that disseminated European ideas of pluralism and constitutionalism through their writings (Karpas 1964:260-261).⁴ The disputes played out in the columns were concerned with strategies of reform and how to rejuvenate the ailing empire, and these political commitments eventually lead to a short-lived constitution and a parliament. After sultan Abdülhamit II (1876-1909) dissolved this parliament in 1878, less than a year after its inauguration, a period of despotism and suppression followed until the Young Turk revolution in 1908. Under the Young Turks the press initially was quite vibrant and free. It expanded quickly and became associated with the emerging political parties (Karpas 1964:267-268). But the period of free debate was cut short by increasing authoritarianism by the Young Turks from 1912 to the Ottoman military defeat in World War I in 1918.

I have organised the period from the end of World War I to the present in three periods: The first chronicle the development through the Independence War (1921-1922) and the One-Party era, the second the period from the first democratic election in Turkey in 1946 until the military intervention in 1980, and the third from the 1980 coup until the present.

2.2.1. 1918-1946: Rise and decline of the Republican Press

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the father of modern Turkey, knew the importance of the press and the value of publicity. He is reported to have said that: “Indoctrination and information was very important, as important as the question of the army, and even more important than the army” (Karpas 1964:270). When he studied at the War College (1899-

³ According to Karpas (1964:262), the average circulation of newspapers was a few thousand. The total number of Turkish newspapers and periodicals published in 1872 was 9, while foreign language journals numbered 30.

⁴ The best known of these intellectuals is the prose writer and poet Namık Kemal (1840-1888).

1902) and the Staff College (1902-1904) in Istanbul he and some friends wrote and published a handwritten newspaper that was clearly political and subversive in outlook. It consisted of criticism of what they saw as the shortcomings in the administration and the policies of the Ottoman state (Mango 2002:51-52). Atatürk took up journalism again in 1918, when he wrote editorials for and helped finance the newspaper *Minber* (The Pulpit). In conjunction with the Sivas Congress in 1919 he helped publish the newspaper *Irade'i Milliye* (National Will).⁵ This paper, under the subsequent titles of *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (National Sovereignty) and *Ulus* (Nation), for years remained the mouthpiece of the government and the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP; Republican People's Party), founded by Atatürk on 9 September 1923.

Atatürk had made a name for himself as a brave military officer during World War I, and his political ambitions made him seek publicity, first as a way to win public support, then as a means to indoctrinate the public in his vision of a modern and westernised society. The existing press in Istanbul was hostile towards Atatürk's new republican government in Ankara. During the Independence War against Greece there was a sharp distinction between newspapers that sided with Atatürk's government and the ones that sided with the Ottoman Sultan in Istanbul (Mango 2002:398-408). When Atatürk led the Turkish forces to victory over the Greeks, his status increased accordingly. He now had the power to abolish the Sultanate, and the last Ottoman ruler, Abdülmecit II, was reduced to a mere religious figurehead until the Caliphate also was abolished in 1924. With power firmly consolidated in Ankara, but with sporadic rebellions in Anatolia, most notably the Kurdish-Islamic uprising in 1925 led by the Kurdish notable Sheikh Said, Atatürk hardened his attitude towards the press. With the *Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu* (Law on Maintenance of Order) in 1925 the government had the legal means to close publications that criticised it, a power it used extensively.

Atatürk was also responsible for establishing the first Turkish news agency, *Anadolu Ajansı* (The Anatolian Agency), on 6 April 1920, and a general directorate of press and information on 7 June the same year (Nozawa-Dursun 1997:11). During the Independence War Atatürk's aim was to inform the public of domestic and international news. After he had consolidated his power and started his sweeping modernising reforms, his information strategies gradually

⁵ The Sivas Congress took place from 4 to 11 September 1919. A representative committee that functioned as the national executive of the resistance movement was elected, and Mustafa Kemal became its president. The resistance movement was formed by Ottoman officers that stood in opposition to the Ottoman government in Istanbul, and its main function was to defend Anatolia against encroachments on the armistice lines after World War I. Greece had occupied Izmir in May 1919, and other nations had also made claims on parts of Anatolia.

became more influenced by his political objectives: the public was to be educated and indoctrinated. Voices that were deemed critical of the reforms and the regime were silenced, with conformity as the end result. It was Atatürk's belief that Turkey was not yet ready for press freedom, and journalists and editors enjoyed little or no protection from the whims of government administrators and high-ranking bureaucrats. Instead the government demanded closer cooperation from the press. This repressive climate caused a decrease in the number of papers published, and consequently to a decrease in the overall circulation (Karpaz 1964:272). But state-suppression is not the whole story. "Until 1946, a large portion of the Turkish press wholeheartedly supported the ruling ideology, Kemalism,⁶ and perceived itself responsible for the preservation of it", according to Çatalbaş (2005:5). She argues that many journalists actually supported censorship when it was deemed necessary to deter challenges to the ruling ideology. She also shows that it could be rewarding to support the official line: between 1920 and 1938 more than 40 of the deputies in the Turkish parliament had their professional background in journalism (2005:6).

Although the number of newspapers were limited and their circulation were low, the press together with radio were the driving forces of a significant development in Turkish society, namely that new ideas for the first time were filtered down to the lower classes.⁷ This rendered them conscious of their relation to the government and to the upper classes, and to the fact that what separated them from the elite was a disparity in social status and economic privilege, not political consciousness. In this manner the media helped to catalyse the opposition towards the ruling elite that resulted in the ousting of *CHP* from power in 1950.

2.2.2. 1946-1980: Challenges to state control

The single party era in Turkey ended with the first general elections in 1946. The rise to political prominence of the opposition *Demokrat Parti (DP; Democratic Party)* in the 1950 elections marked the definitive end of the hegemony of Atatürk's *CHP*. The press developed rapidly in the years following World War II, and the first politically independent mass newspapers appeared in this period (Karpaz 1964:277). Campaigns for press freedom supported by the opposition parties, especially the *DP*, gained momentum. As a consequence

⁶ Kemalism is also known as the "Six Arrows". They refer to the principles of republicanism, statism, secularism (laicism), populism, nationalism and reformism that defined the nature of the Turkish Republic during its formative years. The "Six Arrows" is still used as the symbol of Atatürk's old party, *CHP*.

⁷ The first radio broadcasting station in Turkey was put into operation in 1927 in Istanbul by a private firm under government supervision. Karpaz (1964:275) notes that the introduction of the radio made the concept of direct mass communication more clearly defined in the political leaders' minds.

the majority of the press began to support the *DP*, which was an important factor for the party's success at the polls in 1950 (Nozawa-Dursun 1997:13). The press in many ways was instrumental for the first change of government in Turkey through free elections.

A liberal press environment characterised the first years of *DP* rule, and the number of dailies and periodicals increased rapidly.⁸ Newspapers without party affiliation became popular and influential. Circulation actually dropped immediately if they became associated with a party (Karpat 1964:280). *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* (Nationality) established themselves as major newspapers in this period.⁹ The *DP* government also adopted the first law that recognized and protected the labour rights of professional journalists, despite protests by newspaper owners (Çatalbaş 2005:7). The initial period of cosy relations between the press and the new government came to a halt when the country started to experience severe economic difficulties in the mid 1950s. Prime Minister Adnan Menderes (1899-1961) disliked direct critique just as much as his predecessors had done, and a period of closures of newspapers and imprisonment of journalists followed. Menderes also concluded that the carrot could work as well as the stick to mould the press into loyalty. Allocation of newsprint and distribution of public announcements and advertisements proved to be effective measures to stifle criticism. The papers that accepted these generous financial resources were scornfully named *besleme basın* ("foster-child-press") (Çatalbaş 2005:7). This use of public resources to reward loyal media outlets echoes the more systematised regime of trade-off instigated by Turgut Özal in the 1980s, a phenomenon that will be analysed in chapter four.

Menderes' government was overthrown by the military in May 1960,¹⁰ and the new constitution in 1961 marked a positive step towards further democratisation and liberalisation of oppressive press laws. Article 22 of the constitution affirmed that the press was free and not subject to censorship. Of major importance was two laws passed by the military junta the same year. The first established the *Basın İlan Kurumu* (Press Advertising Corporation) in order to prevent discriminatory allocation of public advertisement, the second, law No. 212, involved protective clauses on the rights of professional journalists. Again newspaper owners protested, and nine major newspapers went out of print for three days (Çatalbaş 2005:8).

⁸ From 1950 to 1952 the number of dailies increased from 131 to 333. The number of periodicals increased from 346 to 650. (Karpat 1964:279)

⁹ The Doğan Group now controls both, and they are still among the best selling papers in Turkey.

¹⁰ Adnan Menderes was sentenced to death by an army-controlled court, and sent to the gallows 17 September 1961. Foreign Minister Fatih Rüştü Zorlu and Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan were also executed.

A relatively liberal environment endured throughout most of the 1960s. Turkey's leftist press developed rapidly, and the quality of newspapers also improved, with increased focus on ideas, views and commentary (Nozawa-Dursun 1997:15). There also was a brief experiment with a self-regulatory authority, the *Basın Şeref Divanı* (Press Honour Council), which operated until 1967, although ineffectively, according to Çatalbaş (2005:8). Circulation increased with the advent of offset techniques, colour prints and photos. But the late 1960s was a period of increasing tensions between leftist and rightist groups. Violent clashes in some big Turkish cities were the excuse needed by the army to intervene in 1971. This resulted in a period of repression of writers and intellectuals, especially leftists. Papers were closed, and journalists imprisoned and tortured. In the late 1970s the conflict between leftists and rightists escalated into a quasi civil war, and people were killed in violent clashes and by terrorist acts every day. This paved the way for yet another military intervention in 1980.

2.2.3.1980-2006: Conglomeration and sensationalism

The early 1980s marks a turning point in the history of the Turkish Republic. The new constitution drawn up by the junta that ruled from 1980 to 1983 reversed the democratic gains made in the preceding decades and limited the freedom of the press. A deliberate policy of depoliticisation, exemplified by the total prohibition of all public discussion of political matters in June 1981, was carried out to cure what was seen as the political ills of the 1970s. The junta instigated a continuous series of closures of newspapers and arrests of journalists and editors (Zürcher 2004:279). The press accordingly started to practice self-censorship due to fear of confiscation, closedown or imprisonment (Nozawa-Dursun 1997:17). The result was a toothless and anaemic media that focused on sex scandals, nude photos and crime.

Historically, the owners of Turkish newspapers have worked as journalists and columnists in their own publications. They were devoted to the profession and their income came from journalism (Tunç 2004:311). The liberal economic policies of Turgut Özal's government, which won power when the army withdrew to its barracks in 1983, accelerated the trend towards a new corporate mentality in the media. The new media owners had made their fortunes in other business sectors, and were largely strangers to the profession. The capitalization of a number of newspapers began through financial support from the government, handed out to businessmen loyal to the regime, and through relationships with banks. Özal's effort to bring the newspaper owners to his side also significantly changed the

nature of the relationship between the political power holders and the press. Criticism of the government had previously been one of the prerequisites for high circulation. With the depoliticisation of the citizenry this was no longer deemed a necessary business strategy. Criticism of the political powers would only mean legal trouble and loss of financial goodwill. In the words of Navaro-Yashin (2002:6): "...the political was turned into a consumer item", and thus trivialised.

Another development of importance in this period is the deregulation of the Turkish broadcasting system. With the launch of the first Turkish private channel, *Star*, on 1 March 1990, the 60-year-old state monopoly abruptly came to an end. To bypass Turkish legislation that protected the state monopoly, the owners of *Star* beamed their signal from Germany. Soon after a number of other companies followed suit, and absolute state control over the airwaves was replaced by total anarchy. It is interesting to note that the company that set all this in motion, *Star's* parent company Magic Box Inc., was partly owned by Turgut Özal's son, Ahmet Özal. Turkey today has 14 national, 13 regional and 203 local television channels, and 33 national, 89 regional and 873 local radio stations, according to Open Society Institute (2005:1543). In addition, the public broadcaster, the *Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu* (*TRT*; Turkish Radio and Television Corporation), has four national, one regional and two international television channels. The enormous amount of satellite dishes covering rooftops, walls and balconies all over Istanbul is clear evidence of the impact the new broadcasting regime has had in Turkey. Even many of the most ramshackle buildings in central Istanbul are now decorated with a satellite dish. To the observant eye they have become as big a part of the urban scenery as the yellow Tofaş cabs that colour the streets of Turkey's biggest city.

Turkish corporate media has experienced a lot of legal and political turbulence during the last six years. The state has taken over the eight television and radio stations and the two newspapers of the Uzan family. The case of Dinç Bilgin's Sabah Group is another interesting example.¹¹ Until April 2001 The Sabah Group and The Doğan Group dominated 80 per cent of the Turkish media sector (Tunç 2004:312). Bilgin was arrested on fraud charges that April, accused of siphoning off millions of dollar from his *Etibank*. These and other related cases will be subject of discussion in the upcoming analysis.

¹¹ This group is often referred to as the Merkez Group or the Bilgin Group. I will use the name Sabah Group in this thesis.

Chapter III: Ownership in Turkish media

This chapter will provide an up-to-date insight into who-owns-what in the Turkish media industry, with focus on the biggest players. It will also provide an insight into how the major conglomerates in Turkey in general have organised their businesses. The Doğan Group, the undisputable market leader in the media sector, is chosen as a case to illustrate this. The chapter will also provide brief accounts of other major and midsize players, and show the relative strength between them. But to get a notion of the bigger picture, I will first discuss a crucial determinant to understand the development of media in all capitalist societies: the size and the wealth of the economy and market.

3.1. Market size

The resources available for consumption of media are constrained by the size and the wealth of a given economy. This logic seems inescapable in any free market, regardless of the sources of funding involved (Doyle 2002:15). To illustrate the size of the Turkish media market I will compare it with the size of markets in other countries, more or less randomly chosen. One can argue that there are many known and unknown variables that shape some of these figures, and that they consequently are ill suited for comparison. My point is that the Turkish media market is small, has a long way to go before it reaches the level of Western media markets, and that the size of the market is an important determinant for diversity of media output because the purchasing power of the population in a free market economy decides how many outlets that will survive. I believe the following figures prove my point. Table 1 compares Turkey's economy to some selected countries.

Table 1: Population and GDP (in USD).			
Country	Population	GDP	GDP per capita
United States of America	295 734 134	11 750 billion	40 100
Japan	127 417 244	3 745 billion	29 400
Turkey	69 660 559	509 billion	7 400
France	60 656 178	1 737 billion	28 700
Poland	38 635 144	463 billion	12 000
Norway	4 593 041	183 billion	40 000
Source: CIA World Factbook: http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html			

Average circulation of newspapers is a key marker for measuring the size of a media market. The four dailies with the largest average circulation in Turkey at the time of writing are the

mainstream secular *Posta* (Mail), *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* (Morning), and the moderate Islamic *Zaman* (Time). The rank and circulation of the ten best selling papers have varied quite a lot in the last decades. Total circulation for the 35 leading national newspapers from 17 January to 23 January 2005 was 4 626 267 copies.¹ According to these figures the four largest papers controlled in excess of 40 per cent of the market. Total average circulation for all the 81 national and regional daily newspapers in 2004 was 4 948 000, up 11% from 2003 (WAN 2005:20). Circulation of Turkish newspapers is very low in comparison with Central and North European countries and Japan measured by population size. 65,7% of all adult Norwegians in average buys one newspaper each day. The same number for Japan is 64,4%, the US 23,3%, France 16%, Poland 13,5% and Turkey 9,6% (WAN 2005:52).

Table 2: Average circulation of daily newspapers 2000-2004 (in thousands).²					
Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Japan	71 896	71 694	70 815	70 339	70 364
United States of America	55 773	55 578	55 186	55 185	54 626
France	8 423	8 429	8 151	8 037	7 934
Turkey	4 047	3 281	3 306	4 433	4 948
Poland	2 820	4 001	3 854	3 934	4 333
Norway	2 578	2 527	2 524	2 450	2 405
Source: World Association of Newspapers (2005): 50					

Another key marker for measuring the media market in a given country is the amount of revenues earned from advertising. For Turkish dailies these revenues amounted to USD 421 million in 2004 (WAN 2005:57). US newspapers made more than 100 times this amount. The numbers for Turkey over the past five years clearly indicates that the economy has been unstable, as is shown in table 3. The severe economic crisis that hit the country in November 2000 and February 2001 is the most important cause.

¹ Statistics taken from a weekly report compiled of sales figures from the marketing and distribution companies *Yaysat* and *Merkez Dağıtım Pazarlama (MDP)*. Given to the author by program coordinator Başar Başarır of CNN Türk, İkitelli, Istanbul, 25 January 2005.

² Both paid for and free newspapers are included. Free papers constitute a marginal share in all these countries.

Table 3: Advertising revenues for daily newspapers 2000-2004 (in USD millions).					
Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
United States of America	48 670	44 305	44 102	44 939	46 703
Japan	11 075	11 091	10 995	10 908	-
France	2 811	1 864	2 616	2 589	2 723
Norway	1 088	1 088	1 017	990	1 045
Poland	253	272	272	393	502
Turkey ³	153	175	255	306	421
Source: World Association of Newspapers (2005): 57					

33,3% of the advertising revenues in Turkey in 2004 went to newspapers, 53,4% to television (WAN 2005:3). The percentage share of revenues from advertising between print media and broadcasting are fairly similar in Japan and the US compared with Turkey, while newspapers get the biggest chunk of the advertising pie in Norway. In Poland 54,2% of the revenues goes to television, while the share to newspapers is 14,8% (Ibid).

To get the whole picture we also need to see how big the contribution of advertising is to the total revenues of the newspapers. This is shown in table 4.

Table 4: Contribution to newspapers' revenues (%).			
Country⁴	Year	Advertising	Sales
United States of America	2003	86,6	13,4
Japan	2003	62,6	37,4
France	2002	39,5	60,5
Turkey	2004	57,3	42,7
Norway	2004	51,4	48,6
Source: World Association of Newspapers (2005): 4			

All these figures clearly indicate that the Turkish media market is very small. Combined revenues from advertising and sales in newspapers in 2004 were USD 735 million, compared

³ High inflation rates and an unstable currency make these numbers a bit misleading. If we apply constant 2002 prices, the revenues from advertising in 2000 actually were higher than the revenues in 2004 (WAN 2005:647). This corresponds well with the meltdown that dealt a hard blow to the advertising industry in 2000 and 2001. Numbers from *Reklamcılar derneği* (Turkish Association of Advertising Agencies) show that the advertising market fell from 1 055 million USD in 2000 to 540 million USD in 2001. <http://www.rd.org.tr/> (23.06.2005)

⁴ I have not found any authoritative figures for Poland.

with USD 17,4 billion in Japan, and more than USD 50 billion in the US. The difference in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita only partly explains this imbalance. Turks spend a smaller percentage of their money on media consumption and advertising than Japanese, Norwegian, French and US citizens. Consequently the economy supports fewer media outlets, a fact that indicates that the amount of pluralism in a given society at least to some extent is dependent upon the wealth and size of the market. It is important to note that these numbers have no explanatory power concerning quality and only some in explaining diversity.

3.2. The Turkish holding company

The political elite embodied in the state has been the dominant player in Turkey's development. Turkey is a late-industrialising country, and capitalization is hence a quite recent phenomenon. Buğra (1994:22-23) compares Turkey's modern development with other late-industrialising countries like South Korea and Taiwan. Her conclusion is that these Asian countries' economic success largely can be explained by the political elite's commitment to a coherent, long-term industrial strategy that reduced uncertainty in the economy. This inspired entrepreneurs to develop an industrial outlook rather than a rent-seeking speculative one. Her assessment is that this has not been the case in Turkey, where state intervention has been a major source of uncertainty undermining the development of a long-term industrial approach. The uncertainty stems from unclear boundaries of legitimate state intervention and frequent changes in the direction of the economic policy that has caused ensuing instability of basic macroeconomic indicators.

The unstable economic and political situation to a large degree explains the special way Turkish entrepreneurs have organised their businesses. Because you never know which sector the various governments from time to time will support, or which sectors that will be hit hardest in the next meltdown, you have a better chance of surviving if you spread the risk on many sectors. This has proved to be the best strategy of survival in such an uncertain business climate. According to the author and economist Mustafa Sönmez the mentality that guide the dispositions of Turkish businessmen is more that of the trader than that of the industrialist.

“The private sector as we know it in the modern context is only about 50 years old in Turkey, so Turkish businessmen are still in their baby period. They do not have visions and experience. They try all sectors. If they see an opportunity, for example connected to

*privatisation of public assets, they buy it even if they have no experience with that line of business. To concentrate only on some sectors is a new vision for them.”*⁵

Sakıp Sabancı (1933-2004), one of Turkey’s most prominent and successful businessmen,⁶ in his autobiography identifies two important factors that shaped his business outlook. The first is the overwhelming impact of state-induced uncertainty in business life. He suggests that the success of the Sabancı Group stems from the fact that they have accepted this difficulty as a constant. They have consequently gone ahead with viable projects taking, at the same time, the necessary precautions to prevent the ruining of the enterprise by an unexpected policy change.⁷ In other words: If you are not able to learn to live with the uncertainty, you will not succeed. The other important factor is that a businessman in such an uncertain business environment must rely on the support of his family. Multiactivity firms organised in the form of family owned holding companies consequently constitute the typical big business unit in Turkey. These two themes reoccur as central components in all the autobiographies by prominent Turkish entrepreneurs Buğra (1994:96) has examined in her study. To get a clearer notion of how Turkish entrepreneurs organise their businesses, I will continue with an analysis of one of the leading Turkish conglomerates today, The Doğan Group.

3.3. Profile of the Doğan Group

Aydın Doğan was born in the provincial town of Kelkit in eastern Turkey in 1936. His father was a left-wing mayor in the town, but young Aydın decided to enter business life by setting up a car dealership in 1958 while he was still a student at the Istanbul Economy and Commerce Academy. By his early 20s he had made a small fortune as a distributor of Ford trucks. His entry into the media world was largely accidental. In 1979 the daily newspaper *Milliyet* was offered to him over dinner by its owner, Ercument Karacan, for USD 30 million.⁸

The self-made businessman now controls a business empire with revenues in 2004 totalling more than USD 5,7 billion.⁹ He is currently number 620 on the prestigious Forbes’ list of the world’s richest people, and was one of eight dollar billionaires in Turkey in 2004, according

⁵ Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

⁶ With a personal fortune estimated at around USD 3.2 billion, Sakıp Sabancı was Turkey's richest man when he died in 2004. Sabancı Holding, the conglomerate he headed, ranks about 85th among the world's largest family-owned businesses. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/turkey/story/0,12700,1193172,00.html> (19.10.2005)

⁷ Sabancı and Koç are the biggest conglomerates in Turkey. They are not heavily involved in the media business.

⁸ The Economist (2002): *Face Value: A Turkish Rupert Murdoch*. 362 (8260). 70.

⁹ Press release, Doğan Holding: <http://www.doganholding.com.tr/investment/index.asp?dilid=2> (31.10.2005)

to the same magazine.¹⁰ His business empire is built by buying and setting up companies in banking, insurance, energy, media, tourism, industry and trade. All these various activities are organised under the umbrella of Doğan Holding, 65.52% of which is controlled by the Doğan family, and 34,29% traded on the Istanbul Stock Exchange (Doğan Holding 2004:147). Table 5 shows a somewhat simplified version of the Doğan Group's non-media companies.¹¹

Table 5: Doğan Holding			
Banking & insurance	Energy	Tourism	Industry & trade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dışbank¹² • Dışbank Malta Limited • Dış Yatırım • Dış Factoring • Dış Portföy • Dış Leasing • Ray Sigorta • Doğan Emeklilik 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petrol Ofisi • Erk Oil Investments • Petrol Ofisi International Trading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milta Turizm: Milta Bodrum Marina • Majesty Club Kemer Beach Holiday Village • Club Milta Holiday Village • Işıl Tur • Doğan Air 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Çelik Halat • Ditaş • Doğan Otomobilcilik • Milpa • Hürriyet Pazarlama • Doğan Organic Products
Sources: Doğan Holding 2004:4; Sönmez 2004:139			

Doğan Holding is in fact formed by two separate holding companies: *Doğan Sirketler Grubu Holding*, which the group itself refers to simply as Doğan Holding, and *Doğan Yayın Holding*. The Doğan family controls both holdings, and both are by the group itself referred to as part of the overall Doğan Group. They also have the same CEO, currently Tufan Darbaz, and the same chairman, Aydın Doğan himself. The non-media activities are organised under the former holding, while *Doğan Yayın Holding* was established in 1996 to merge all the media related activities under one umbrella. These are shown in table 6.

¹⁰ <http://www.forbes.com/2005/03/09/bill05land.html> (18.05.2005)

¹¹ Many of these companies also have daughter companies. For a more detailed analysis of these somewhat complicated company structures, see Mustafa Sönmez (2004:137-164).

¹² The Benelux based banking and insurance company Fortis bought Dışbank from the Doğan family 4 July 2005. Radikal (2005): "Doğan bankacılık sektöründen çıktı" (*Doğan leaves the banking sector*) <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=157761> (21.10.2005)

Table 6: Doğan Yayın Holding	
Newspapers	Hürriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Posta, Fanatik, Fanatik Basket, Gözcü, Referans, Turkish Daily News
Broadcasting & Production	Television Channels: Kanal D, CNN TÜRK, Euro D Cable TV Channels: Bravo TV, Super Channel Radio Stations: Radyo D, Hür FM, Radyo Foreks Production: ANS Production
Digital Media	Doğan Online, Ultra Cable TV, Hürriyet Internet
Magazines & Books	Doğan Burda Rizzoli, Doğan Books, Doğan Egmont Publishing, DPP
Distribution & Retailing	Yaysat/Doğan Dağıtım, D&R
Printing	Doğan Printing Centers, Doğan Ofset
Support services	Doğan News Agency, Doğan Factoring
Presence in Europe	DYH International
Music	Doğan Music Company
Sources: Doğan Holding 2004:5; Sönmez 2004:139	

Although Aydın Doğan today probably is best known as Turkey's biggest media mogul, the trade from the group's media outlets in fact constitute a small amount of its total sales. In 2000 the Doğan Group together with the bank *İş Bankası* bought 51% of the leading oil distribution company in Turkey, *Petrol Ofisi*, from the state.¹³ Since then the energy sector has contributed a substantial part of the Doğan Group's total revenues, as is shown in table 7.

Table 7: Share of revenues in Doğan Holding (in USD millions).¹⁴					
Year	Media	Energy	Finance	Other	Total
1999 ¹⁵	-	-	987	-	1 746
2000	642	858	852	193	2 545
2001	430	1836	753	79	3 098
2002	462	2 232	693	64	3 451
2003	665	2 844	845	107	4 462
Sources: Annual Reports from Doğan Holding.					

¹³ Zaman (2002): "Petrol Ofisi, İş-Doğan'la birleşmeye hazırlanıyor" (Petrol Ofisi ready to get united with İş (Bankası) and Doğan). <http://www.zaman.com.tr/2002/10/02/ekonomi/h8.htm> (21.10.2005)

¹⁴ A revenue breakdown by sectors shows that energy constitutes 62 %, media 19 % and finance 15 % of the Doğan Group's total revenues in 2004 (Kilickiran & Erda 2005:8).

¹⁵ I have not found authoritative numbers for the categories media, energy and other for 1999.

As previously mentioned, the media sector in Turkey has on the whole not been profitable during the last decades. The big conglomerates in the media sector have made their profits elsewhere. As table 8 shows, this is to a large degree also the case with the Doğan Group, although this group arguably is the most professionally run media group in Turkey.¹⁸ According to Mango, Doğan is the only Turkish media owner who see newspapers as a “commercial enterprise” (2004:201). The implications of this statement will be analysed in detail in chapter five.

Year	Media	Energy	Finance	Other	Total	Total net income
1999 ¹⁷	-	-	246	-	306	74
2000	25	39	161	-24	201	61
2001	-15	52	66	-35	69	-147
2002	19	43	107	-44	125	58
2003	5	70	231	-66	240	275

Sources: Annual Reports from Doğan Holding.

The Doğan Group is a typical representative of the big Turkish multiactivity conglomerate. Aydın Doğan’s success to a large degree stems from his ability to make investments at the right moment when opportunities arise. He has profited from the privatisation boom that started in the early 1980s by buying state assets in the energy and tourism sector, and he has been quite successful in his dealings in the troubled Turkish financial sector. A reading of annual reports over a period of four years shows a great deal of changes in the group’s portfolio. Many companies have been bought and many sold. A clear strategy of reducing the amount of activities to focus on one or a few core sectors is not clearly visible. On the other hand, one can argue that the group has been consistent in its commitment to the media sector, where it has been the most successful player. This is interesting when we take into account the weak performance in this sector. Before I move on to discuss other players in Turkish media, I will briefly discuss the future prospects of profitability in the media sector in general to see if this can shed some light on Aydın Doğan’s unfaltering commitment.

¹⁶ On 22 February 2001, due to the turmoil in the Turkish financial sector, the Turkish government adapted a free-floating exchange rate. As a consequence, the Turkish lira depreciated in excess of 85% compared to the exchange rates that prevailed 31 December 2000.

¹⁷ I have not found authoritative numbers for the categories media, energy and other for 1999.

¹⁸ According to Mustafa Sönmez, there is a culture for taking money from profitable sectors and injecting them into less profitable ones. The official figures will not display this discrepancy. Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

3.3.1. Prospects for profitability

As shown earlier (table 4) advertisement contributed almost 60% of the total revenues of Turkish newspapers in 2004. Commercial television is even more dependent upon such revenues. This clearly indicates that players in the media sector is vulnerable to changes in the overall spending on advertisement. One of the lessons of the economic meltdown in 2000 and 2001 in Turkey was that sectors dependent upon advertising revenues are among the first to get hit severely. This corresponds well with the general wisdom from extensive studies of the relationship between overall economic performance and the performance of the advertising sector. “Advertising tends to gallop ahead more quickly than the economy in boom periods, but then slumps more quickly in recession”, according to Doyle (2002b:49). She identifies two primary forces which appear to determine the growth or decline of advertising expenditure: the first is the overall expenditure of consumers, the second is company profits. In other words: “Advertising expenditure expands along with consumer expenditure, but is reined back when company profits are under pressure” (Ibid).

Between the first quarters of 2002 and 2004 the economic growth in Turkey reached 7,1% annually, marking a substantial recovery (Commission of the European Communities 2004:60). The main source of this growth was exports of goods and services. Private consumption only increased on average by 0,4%, reflecting weak growth in real wages and increasing unemployment. So while company profits in some sectors increased, domestic consumer expenditure did not increase accordingly. Although only one of the primary forces identified by Doyle is heading in the right direction, various analysts still predict that the advertising sector will experience substantial growth in the years to come. According to the corporate finance advisory agency CA IB the advertising market grew by more than 30% in 2004 (Kilickiran & Erda 2005:24). Expected growth for 2005 is 20%. One of the main reasons why CA IB identifies the Doğan Group as an attractive investment opportunity for foreign investors is the expectation of “at least 18% annual growth on ad spending over the next 10 years” (Ibid:1). This forecast is largely based on the growth in the ad market in Eastern European countries over the last 10 years, and is closely tied to these countries integration into the EU. The parameter used in analysing these trends is ad spending compared in % with GDP. In Poland ad spending has increased from 0,43% to 1,39% of GDP between 1994 and 2003 (Ibid:23). The same trend is visible in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Bulgaria. In Turkey ad spending has increased marginally from 0,37% to 0,43% of GDP

in the same period. CA IB's prediction is consequently tied to the prospects of Turkish EU membership. If the membership talks that started 3 October 2005 ends with a Turkish-European marriage, it is likely that spending on advertising will increase as it has done in the Eastern European countries, according to CA IB's analysis. More money from advertising will in turn bring more money to the media companies, and the profit rates will increase.

There are however good reasons to keep the best wine in the cooler for now. Firstly, it is highly uncertain that the membership talks will end in a happy marriage. Secondly, severe recessions have been a recurrent feature in Turkey, and it is far too early to conclude that this chronic disease is cured once and for all. Thirdly, many of the underlying ideological, ethnic and religious causes behind the violence and upheavals that has plagued the young republic has not been sufficiently dealt with. Fourthly, the future of neighbouring countries such as Iraq, Syria and Iran are unclear, and conflicts in or between these countries are likely to produce negative consequences for Turkey. Until these ills are cured, at least the ones that the Turks have the remedy to cure themselves, Sakıp Sabancı's mantra may still be the best business strategy in Turkey: if you are not able to live with uncertainty, you will not succeed. And the way to live with uncertainty is to spread the financial risk on many different sectors, like most of the survivors on the top shelf of Turkish business life have done.

3.4. Other major players

Recurring cases of ownership changes, bankruptcy and criminal indictments against media owners make the media sector in Turkey a complex field of study. The overview I present here is based on research done in 2005 and early 2006, and consequently portrays the situation at that time. Major changes sometimes occur out of the blue, at least it appears so to the bystander, and the map may look very different in a couple of years. The fact that the Doğan Group is the only long lasting major media conglomerate that has not been entangled with the *Tasarruf Mevduatı Sigorta Fonu (TMSF; Savings Deposits Insurance Fund)*¹⁹ or state prosecutors lately, speaks for itself. The Doğan Group is by far the largest player in the Turkish media sector. But there are a number of other important players as well. I will divide them in a three-tier system according to size, and focus on the first two tiers. The first consists of three major multi-activity conglomerates: the Doğan Group, the Ciner Group²⁰ and the

¹⁹ *TMSF* is a government institution responsible for restructuring and managing ailing or bankrupt banks. It also has the power to take over other belongings of bankrupt and/or criminally indicted business owners.

²⁰ The Ciner Group was named after its owner 1 January 2005. Until then it was called the Park Group.

Çukurova Group. These three groups control somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent of the total media market.²¹ Some areas of the market are totally dominated by one or more of these groups. One example is distribution of printed media: Doğan's *Yaysat* controls 60 per cent of this market, while Ciner's *Merkez Dağıtım Pazarlama (MDP)* controls the remaining 40 per cent (Open Society Institute 2005:1579).

3.4.1. The Ciner Group

The self-made multimillionaire Turgay Ciner controls the Ciner Group.²² He started his business career in the automotive industry in 1978. Today the group bearing his name is involved in energy, mining, media, tourism, aviation, commerce and services. Ciner got heavily involved in the media business in 2002, when he acquired the rights to run the media outlets of the Sabah Group. The Sabah Group had as mentioned earlier been a prominent player in the Turkish media sector since the newspaper *Sabah* commenced publication in 1985. The group's founder, Dinç Bilgin, was arrested in April 2001, charged for siphoning off millions of dollars from his own *Etibank*. After his arrest the *TMSF* took control over most of Bilgin's belongings. In 2002 Turgay Ciner was allowed a tenant position of Bilgin's media outlets under a 15-year lease contract for USD 10 million a year,²³ the most important of which was the major dailies *Sabah*, *Takvim* (Calendar) and the sports daily *Fotomaç* (Fotomatch), and the major TV-channel *ATV*. Recently Ciner bought both *Sabah* and *ATV* from *TMSF* for 435 million USD.²⁴ The Ciner Group also controls Turkey's largest regional daily, the Izmir based *Yeni Asır* (New Era), a number of magazines and some smaller TV stations. In a matter of years Ciner has become Aydın Doğan's chief rival on the media scene.

3.4.2. The Çukurova Group

The Çukurova Group, headed by Mehmet Emin Karamehmet (b. 1944), traces its beginnings to a yarn and thread factory in Tarsus in southern Turkey. Together with another family the Karamehmets owned thousands of acres of farmland in the Çukurova Valley, one of Turkey's

²¹ The Uzan Group is often included in the first tier. I argue that this group belongs to the second tier, as I will demonstrate in tables 9, 10 and 11.

²² Turgay Ciner paid a short visit to the Forbes' list of dollar billionaires in 2002. He was ranked as number 445. <http://www.forbes.com/finance/lists/10/2002/LIR.jhtml?passListId=10&passYear=2002&passListType=Person&uniqueId=04PT&datatype=Person> (25.10.2005) In July 2005 the Ciner Group bought the publication rights of Forbes Magazine in Turkey. <http://www.cinergroup.com.tr/en/gnews047.htm> (25.10.2005)

²³ Turkish Daily News (2005): "Ciner's Merkez Group acquires ATV and Sabah" <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=12436> (07.02.2006)

²⁴ Radikal (2005): "Sabah ve atv Turgay Ciner'e" (Sabah and ATV (sold) to Turgay Ciner) <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=151650> (25.10.2005)

most fertile areas. The name of the valley was later adopted for their industrial enterprises. Mehmet Emin Karamehmet joined the family business in 1966, and after assuming control he spearheaded the group's entry into banking by buying the banks *Pamukbank* in 1974 and *Yapı Kredi* in 1980. The group really rose to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s when it spearheaded the introduction of mobile telephone technology in Turkey with the company *Turkcell*, which is now the undisputed market leader in this sector.²⁵ In 1998 Çukurova bought the major daily *Akşam* (Evening) from another prominent media mogul at the time, Erol Aksoy. The group also controls the dailies *Güneş* (Sun) and *Tercüman* (Interpreter), Turkey's largest terrestrial TV channel *Show*, a couple of cable and satellite TV channels and the radio station *Alem FM*. Çukurova, rated as Turkey's third largest business group with publicly listed firms in 2003 (Yurtoglu 2003:22), has recently experienced serious financial troubles. The *TMSF* took control of *Pamukbank* in 2002, and the group's biggest asset, *Turkcell*, is reportedly about to be sold.²⁶ Çukurova according to some estimates owes *TMSF* a total of five billion USD because of money the group has borrowed from its own two banks and not been able to pay back.²⁷

3.5. Midsize groups

The second tier consists of the Uzan, İhlas, Doğuş, Samanyolu and Aksoy groups. Both the Uzan Group and the Aksoy Group have recently been completely taken over by the *TMSF*, but they are included here because it still is unclear what will happen to their belongings. There are also cases of Turkish businessmen that have made a comeback after years of financial and legal trouble, and we cannot rule out this possibility for the Uzans or Aksoy.

3.5.1. The Uzan Group

The troubles of Çukurova are small potatoes compared with the mess the Uzan Group is entangled in. Kemal Uzan built a construction empire in the 1970s and 1980s, according to some sources benefiting from close ties with Turgut Özal.²⁸ Kemal's son, Cem Uzan, headed the family's entry into the media business when he launched Turkey's first private TV

²⁵ At the height of the dot.com boom Turkcell was valued to USD 17 billion. On 11 July 2000 the company became the first in Turkey to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

²⁶ Milliyet (2005): "*Karamehmet, Ruslarla anlaştı, İsveçliler uyardı*" (Karamehmet has reached an agreement with the Russians (and) warned the Swedes). <http://www.milliyet.com/2005/06/23/ekonomi/aeko.html> (27.10.2005)

²⁷ Onaran, Yalman (2005): "*Turkcell's Karamehmet Frets as \$10 Billion Becomes \$500 Million*". <http://quote.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=nifea&&sid=aJ8sjsQeCPP4> (26.10.2005)

²⁸ Purvis, Andrew (2003): "Not just business as usual". In *Time Europe Magazine*. 162 (5).

channel, *Star*, together with Özal's son, Ahmet. A daily newspaper by the same name was launched later. The group has in addition built Turkey's second largest mobile-phone carrier, *Telsim*. But as they have grown in size, their troubles have also multiplied. During the telecom boom of the late 1990s, Motorola and Nokia lent USD 2 billion and USD 700 million, respectively, to *Telsim*. The Uzans never paid them back. In 2002, the two firms filed racketeering charges against the family in a US Federal Court, accusing them of perpetrating an elaborate scam. The court awarded Motorola and Nokia USD 5 billion in damages, compensation and interest.²⁹ Things got even worse in July 2003, when the *Bankacılık Denetleme ve Düzenleme Kurulu (BDDK; Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency)* revoked the banking license of the Uzan bank *İmar Bankası*, and transferred the bank's management to the *TMSF*. In February 2004 hundreds of Uzan companies, including their media interests, were also transferred to the *TMSF*. According to some estimates, the Uzans owe the Turkish state USD 6 billion, an amount that comes on top of the USD 5 billion they owe Motorola and Nokia.³⁰ In 2005 and early 2006 many of the Uzan family's companies and properties have been auctioned in tenders arranged by *TMSF*, and more auctions will follow. In September 2005 *Işıl Televizyon*, which is controlled by the Doğan Group, bought *Star TV* for USD 306,5 million.³¹ In January 2006 the daily *Star* was bought by the businessman Ali Özmen Safa from Northern Cyprus for USD 5,15 million.³² With this chain of events it looks like the Uzan Group is out as a major player in the media business, at least for now, and the Doğan Group has strengthened its position as the undisputable market leader even further.

3.5.2. The İhlas Group

The İhlas Group traces its beginnings to 1970, when Enver Ören decided to leave his academic career to launch the newspaper *Türkiye* (Turkey) with some friends. The Ören family still controls the group. As opposed to the majority of the other major conglomerates operating in the media sector, the İhlas Group started out as a media company. The success of the moderate Islamic-oriented *Türkiye* laid the foundation for the group's further expansions, providing "a strong engine of growth for other İhlas businesses" (İhlas Holding 2005:1). The İhlas Group is now active in an array of sectors including media, marketing, construction,

²⁹ The Economist (2005): "Den of thieves: The importance of fighting corruption". 374 (8418) 16-17.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Radikal (2005): "Star TV, 306.5 milyon dolar" (Star TV (sold for) USD 306,5 million). <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=165194> (27.10.2005)

³² Çakır, Necip (2006): "Star Gazetesi 5,15 milyon dolara KKTC'li işadamının" (Star (sold) for \$5.15 Million to businessman from Northern Cyprus). <http://www.zaman.com.tr/?bl=ekonomi&alt=&trh=20060126&hn=250580> (03.02.2006)

health, insurance, education and real estate investment. The various arms of the group are organised under İhlas Holding. The group has been recognized as one of a growing number of Islamic business houses in Turkey (Yuce 2003; Yavuz & Esposito 2003:xxvi). In 2003 İhlas established *İhlas Yayın Holding* to cater for the group's growing number of media interests. In addition to the daily newspaper *Türkiye*, İhlas controls Turkey's fifth largest television channel, *TGRT*, along with *TGRT* radio channel, the news agency *İhlas Haber Ajansı* and twelve magazines. Recently it has been reported that İhlas is about to sell its controlling stake in the *TGRT* television channel because of financial difficulties.³³ This is not the first time İhlas has been in financial trouble. In 2001 their financial arm, the İhlas Finance Company, was partly transferred to the *TMSF* after reports that its owners had siphoned of USD 1 billion of depositors' funds to shore up their other ailing businesses.³⁴

3.5.3. The Doğuş Group

Ayhan Şahenk (1929-2001) laid the foundation of the Doğuş Group when he invested in a construction company in 1951. The group is still controlled by the Şahenk family, and is with an annual turnover in 2004 of almost USD 6 billion one of the biggest conglomerates in Turkey (Doğuş Group 2005:6). It is active in banking and finance, insurance, construction, media, energy, tourism and automotive retailing. The group got involved in media when it acquired the television channel *NTV* in 1999. Its media operations today include the terrestrial television channel *NTV*, the cable and satellite channels *CNBC-e*, *Discovery Channel*, *National Geographic Türkiye* and *NBATV*, the radio stations *NTV Radyo* and *Radyo Eksen*, and six magazines. Most of the group's media outlets are segment or elite oriented, and they thus have moderate viewer ship and circulation ratios. But some of their outlets, especially *NTV*, are important because its viewers tend to be highly educated and well-off people.

3.5.4. The Samanyolu Group

The Samanyolu Group is controlled by one of Turkey's most prominent socio-religious movements: The Fethullah Gülen Movement. The movement blossomed during the 1980s when the government and the army decided to relax its strong-handed treatment of Islamic groups as a means to counter the leftists they claimed was responsible for the violence and turmoil of the preceding decade. In response to this opportunity "the movement stressed the

³³ Radikal (2005): "*TGRT satışı sona yakın*" (TGRT-sale close to an end).

<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=165898> (29.10.2005)

³⁴ The Economist (2005): "*Turkish corruption: Still for sale*" 374 (8434). 24.

significance of the media and market economy and tried to become more professional by establishing new broadcasting companies, publishing presses, and cultural foundations” (Yavuz 2003:36). Today the group controls a nationwide media empire that includes the major daily newspaper *Zaman*, the television channel *STV*, the radio station *Burç FM*, the news agency *Cihan Haber Ajansı*, the weekly magazine *Aksiyon* (Action) and several other periodicals.³⁵ It also controls the finance house *Asya Finans*,³⁶ and is linked to a number of business groups and rich entrepreneurs who help fund many of its educational operations.

3.5.5. The Aksoy Group

The businessman Erol Aksoy founded the television channel *Show* in 1992. He also controlled the daily newspapers *Akşam*, *Güneş* and *Tercüman*. Due to financial difficulties these assets were all sold to the Çukurova Group in the last half of the 1990s. In 2001 his bank *Iktisat Bankası* was seized by the *BDDK*. Aksoy managed to hold on to his other media assets until the *TMSF* in May 2004 confiscated 38 of his companies, including the terrestrial television channels *Cine5* and *Fantasy*, the cable and satellite channels *Maxi*, *Supersport Gala* and *Viva*, and the radio stations *Show Radyo*, *Radio5* and *Radyo Viva*, reportedly because Aksoy had not been able to pay back the USD 1,6 billion he owed the Turkish state.³⁷

3.6. Relative strength

The Doğan Group has established itself firmly as the major media conglomerate in Turkey, with the Ciner Group as its main rival. The troubled Çukurova Group still controls the largest TV channel, but is losing ground to its two first-tier rivals. Of the second-tier groups only the Doğuş Group and the Samanyolu Group is currently reported to be in good financial health. There are also some important private first-tier publishers. *Bağımsız Gazeteciler Yayıncılık*, a group headed by former editor-in-chief of *Sabah*, Zafer Mutlu, publishes *Vatan* (Fatherland). The Islamist intellectual *Yeni Şafak* (New Dawn) is controlled by the Albayrak Group, a conglomerate with its core businesses in food production, marketing and trade of agricultural products. In addition the public broadcaster *TRT*, although it has lost millions of viewers to private television, is still important. Most of the other first-tier media organisations are increasingly losing ground to the major conglomerates. It is also interesting to note that the state controlled *TMSF* has become a major player in the media sector at a time when the

³⁵ Feza Publications, a subsidiary of the Samanyolu Group, owns *Zaman*, *Aksiyon* and Cihan News Agency.

³⁶ *Asya Finans*, established in 1996, works in accordance with the (Islamic) principles of interest-free banking.

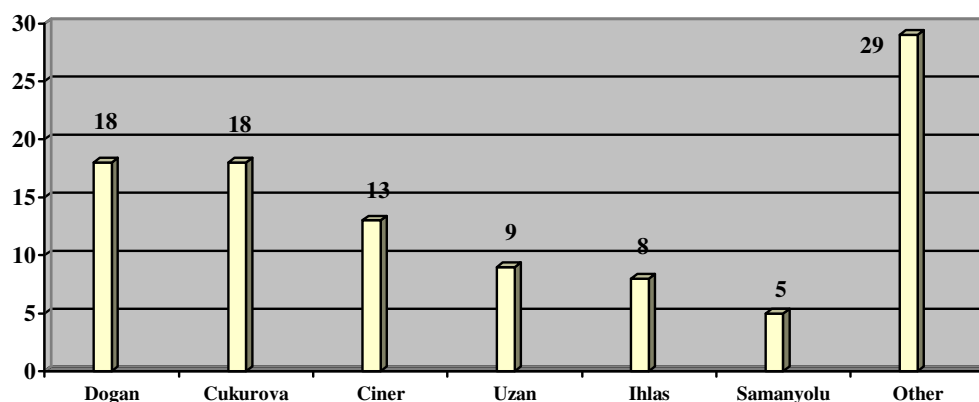
³⁷ *Hürriyet* (2004): "TMSF'den Aksoy'a sert yanıt" (Harsh response from TMSF to Aksoy)

<http://www.hurriyetim.com.tr/haber/0,,sid~1@w~4@tarih~2004-05-27-m@nvid~418419,00.asp> (31.10.2005)

government has speeded up its massive privatisation program. When the *TMSF* seized the Uzan family’s media companies, opposition voices claimed that the outlets now would become mouthpieces of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP; Justice and Development Party)*.³⁸ But the sale of *ATV* and *Sabah* to the Ciner Group and *Star* to the Doğan Group indicates that the *AKP* government, which has an absolute majority in parliament, wants to sell off all the seized companies. It is a necessity if the *TMSF* is to recoup the USD 42.7 billion that it reportedly has poured in to rehabilitate the mess the 23 private banks it has taken over has created in the banking sector.

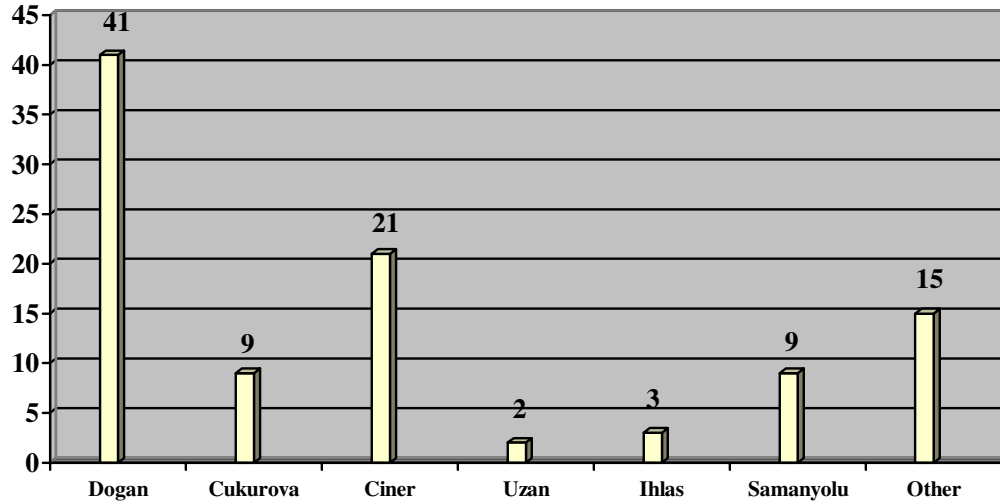
The eight groups presented in this chapter confirm the overall picture of the traditional way to organise big business in Turkey. All are multiactivity conglomerates, and members of the founding family control seven of them. The last, the Samanyolu Group, is organised around confessional rather than kinship relations, and thus fits the picture as well. To sum up I will provide tables to illustrate the Turkish media sector. Tables 9, 10 and 12 show the relative strength between the groups,³⁹ table 11 shows the audience shares of the main television channels, while Table 13 shows circulation and ownership of the largest dailies.

Table 9: Broadcasting market (%)



³⁸ Turkish Daily News (2003): “*CHP's Koc: Star becoming AK Party's mouthpiece*” <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=35400> (06.02.2006)

³⁹ These figures are collected from a variety of sources: Doğan Holding 2001-2004; Doğan Yayın Holding 2004-2005; Open Society Institute 2005; WAN 2005; Kilickiran & Erda 2005 and Sönmez 2004 are the most important. Although there are some minor divergences, the relative strength between the groups are the same in all the sources. Doğan’s recent takeover of *Star TV* is not included in table 9, since the deal is not yet finalized. The Doğan Group will control 27 per cent of the broadcasting market as a result of this acquisition.

Table 10: Circulation newspapers (%)**Table 11: Audience shares of main channels (%) 2002-2004**

Rank	Channel	Owner	2004	2003	2002
1	<i>Show</i>	Çukurova	17,0	14,4	13,5
2	<i>Kanal D</i>	Doğan	15,1	15,0	14,5
3	<i>ATV</i>	Ciner	11,4	13,6	15,2
4	<i>Star</i>	Uzan (Doğan)	9,2	5,1	12,0
5	<i>TGRT</i>	İhlas	8,0	8,1	7,2
6	<i>Kanal 7</i>	Yeni Dünya İletişim	5,7	5,1	5,1
7	<i>TRT 1</i>	Public broadcaster	5,4	7,0	7,5
8	<i>STV</i>	Samanyolu	5,4	-	-
9	<i>Flash</i>	Göktuğ Elektronik	3,2	3,1	2,0
10	<i>TRT 2</i>	Public Broadcaster	1,3	1,8	1,2

Sources: RTÜK: <http://www.rtuk.org.tr/ekabloatv.htm> (10.02.2006); AGB Anadolu, IP International Marketing Committee, Television 2004. International Key Facts, October 2004: 445; Numbers given to the author by marketing director Teoman Gürmen of AGB Nielsen Media Research Turkey (*AGB Anadolu*), Istanbul, 12 July 2005. AGB Nielsen has been the designated TV audience researcher in Turkey since 1992. Data does not represent the actual performance of *Star*. *Star* quit the panel for audience measurement in April 2003 and joined again in March 2004. The actual performance of *Star* for the target group (individuals age 5+) was as follows: January 2003: 13 per cent, February 2003: 14 per cent, and March 2003: 12.8 per cent.

Table 12: Advertising shares (%)

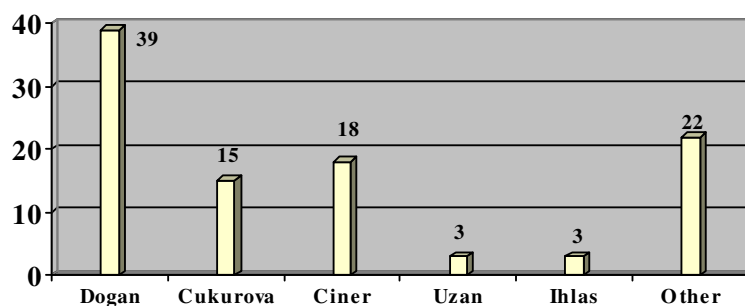


Table 13: Circulation and ownership of main daily newspapers

Rank 17-23 Jan. '05	Newspaper	Owner	Circulation 17- 23 January 2005	Average Circulation 2004	Average Rank 2004
1	<i>Posta</i>	Doğan	582 833	542 000	1
2	<i>Hürriyet</i>	Doğan	490 439	494 000	2
3	<i>Zaman</i>	Samanyolu	475 041	437 000	3
4	<i>Sabah</i>	Ciner	428 613	417 000	4
5	<i>Milliyet</i>	Doğan	307 647	279 000	6
6	<i>Vatan</i>	Bağımsız	273 351	207 000	8
7	<i>Takvim</i>	Ciner	264 903	284 000	5
8	<i>Fanatik</i>	Doğan	205 548	230 000	7
9	<i>Akşam</i>	Çukurova	202 733	207 000	9
10	<i>Türkiye</i>	İhlas	195 023	-	-
11	<i>Fotomaç</i>	Ciner	174 439	177 000	10
12	<i>Güneş</i>	Çukurova	132 582	-	-
13	<i>Gözcü</i>	Doğan	128 387	-	-
14	<i>Yeni Şafak</i>	Albayrak	120 730	-	-
15	<i>Star</i>	Uzan (Safa)	94 529	-	-
16	<i>Tercüman</i>	Çukurova	91 528	-	-

Sources: WAN 2005:647 and a weekly report compiled of sales figures from the marketing and distribution companies *Yaysat* and *Merkez Dağıtım Pazarlama (MDP)* given to the author by program coordinator Başar Başarır of CNN Türk, İkitelli, İstanbul, 25 January 2005.

Chapter IV: Trade-off

“It (Turkey) has begun to integrate itself into the world economy through an export-oriented liberal policy. What should have been done at the beginning of the westernizing reforms has been done at the end, with an enormous loss of time. I wonder whether the late discovery of the secret of the West was an unavoidable mistake inherent in the modernizing process of undeveloped countries which by a wrong reflex choose to implement in the first instance cultural and political reforms.” (Özal 1991:308)

The late Turgut Özal is a controversial figure in Turkey.¹ Some hail him as Turkey’s second great moderniser after Atatürk. They claim he managed to unite the Turks after a decade of political violence, and that he brought the country on the right path by empowering private business interests through laissez-faire economic policies. Others claim he reinforced and even systematised a culture of corruption and clientelism that has plagued the country ever since, that he opened the doors to a re-islamisation of the country, and that his economic policies created widening social gaps. Whatever one thinks of the former premier and president it is clear from his own writings and doings that his interest in liberalism first and foremost was tied to economic policies. Özal greatly admired his contemporaries in office Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, and according to Zürcher (2004:286) he believed in an “unrestricted capitalist free-for-all” approach. For him cultural and political reforms came second, if at all. It is also clear that the decade he presided over in many ways represents a turning point for the Turkish Republic, and that the changes introduced to a large extent was a consequence of the new neo-liberal economic environment. A deeper understanding of the nature of these changes is vital to grasp the Özal era’s impact on the Turkish media scene.

The Turkish Republic is built on a revolution that defined the state as the main engine in society, and the media in Turkey has historically not had the power to challenge the role of the state. Why then did Özal and his cohorts open the door to a concentration of ownership that has left most of the Turkish media in the hands of a few wealthy businessmen? Didn’t the political elite fear that concentration of ownership might tip the balance of power in favour of big business? In this chapter I argue that the political elite had no intention of jeopardising their control on the flow of information, but instead concluded that a new ideological toolbox provided new opportunities for political control. Consequently, they gave certain privileges to

¹ Özal was a self-made businessman, hailing from the provincial town of Malatya. He had been a successful manager in private industry in the 1970s and was well connected in big business circles. (Zürcher 2004:283)

some media players as a more or less implicit trade-off to guarantee obedience from the media. This policy was motivated by a desire to control the main avenues of communication through a system of clientelism, where the number of players would be limited to a handful.

4.1. Trade-off in theory

Trade-off of this kind has many faces, and is not particular to Turkey. In Britain a select group of journalists are given privileged access to government information. The reporters get exclusive copy, and the politically powerful get a chance to give a particular spin to the coverage (Street: 2001:112-113). In the US political reporting is organised around “beats”, which correspond to locations in the government that are regarded as likely arenas of political action. These arenas are controlled by official sources that by default have the means to set the political agenda. Bennett (2000:209-211) argues that: “relatively little independent check is provided by the press on the good judgement or the representative quality of official views and actions”. Closed and semi-closed lobbies like this are ordinary features in many democratic societies, but the degree of transparency and outright corruption varies.

Many scholars have argued that there are ways to forge more fundamental clientelist-based alliances between political and business elites under the umbrella of neo-liberalism (Hallin 2000; Park, Kim & Sohn 2000; Lee 2000; Nain 2000). In late-developing and authoritarian states where economic reforms have predated political reforms this is particularly conspicuous. A common feature in these countries is that many of the forces applied in developed capitalist societies which moderate and regulate the effects of private ownership are absent. In relation to the media sector these forces include limits on ownership concentration, a tradition of public broadcasting, regulatory agencies answerable to a pluralistic political system, and journalistic professionalism. Without these forces there are no clear rules to regulate the game, and the most powerful interests, often groups aligned with the state, have many strategies at their disposal to control the media. The trade-off-argument in other words claims that the study of patron-client relations between political and economic elites in Turkey is essential for a broader understanding of how ownership concentration allegedly have reduced pluralism in a society where most other markers indicate an opposite development. To fully grasp this concept of trade-off we have to keep two interrelated developments in mind: the complete restructuring of the Turkish political field after the military coup in 1980, and the corporate takeover of the media sector in the 1980s and 1990s.

4.2. The legacy of the 1980 coup

When the army took control 12 September 1980 they immediately carried out a complete purging and uprooting of the political system. Parliament was dissolved, the cabinet deposed, all political parties and two trade union confederations suspended, and all mayors and municipal councils dismissed (Zürcher 2004:279). In June 1981 all public discussion of political matters was prohibited. The army justified this radical restructuring by pointing to the factional strife and violence that contributed to thousands of deaths and political and economic chaos in the late 1970s. The new constitution produced by a committee appointed by the army-controlled *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu (MGK)* (National Security Council) concentrated power in the hands of executive, the president and the *MGK*. It also limited the freedom of the press, the freedom of association and the rights and liberties of the individual. So in all fairness to Özal it must be remembered that he inherited a citizenry that by force of law was depoliticised when he took office in 1983, and that the generals closely monitored his actions.

Both the generals and the new government under Özal saw the introduction of free market policies along the lines of the neo-liberalist project of Reagan and Thatcher as a path towards stability and prosperity for Turkey. It is consequently no coincidence that capital owners started to buy up the Turkish press in the early 1980s. It was to a large extent encouraged by the political leadership. The traditional structure where families or organisations that had been in journalism for generations owned newspapers was quickly eroded. The new owners were businessmen who had accumulated their wealth in other sectors and had little or no prior experience with the profession. “This radical shift in terms of organisational power resulted in the owners’ total control over editorial policies, resource allocation, employee salaries, promotion and dismissal of staff, and especially appointment of the editor-in-chief and other editors”, argues Tunç (2004:5). The trend towards conglomerate ownership of the Turkish media sector was further cemented when the broadcasting system was liberalised in the early 1990s. But the political elite has not lost its tight grip on power as a result of this, a peculiarity that is largely a result of contradictions inherent in Turkey’s experiment with economic liberalism, a phenomenon Buğra has called “the paradox of Turkish liberalism” (1994:120).

4.3. Economic liberalism the Turkish way

“The attitude of the political class throughout the 1980s and the 1990s have been quite paradoxical in that, while it has preached the virtues of liberalism and a free market

economy, it has also been using state power and state resources to strengthen its dominance” (Aydın 2005:100-101).

Liberalism in the Turkish context diverges from the traditional notions of liberalism in a number of ways. The state plays such a big part in all aspects of life to render descriptions based on the classic liberal tradition inspired by the likes of Locke, Smith and Bentham almost meaningless. The notion that state intervention is necessary to curb the influence of the strong as we know it from the social liberalism of John Stuart Mill and others could at first glance be a fitting frame for analysis, but the liberalism of Özal and his cohorts did not benefit the have-nots in Turkey. Rather we have seen a rapid widening of the gap between rich and poor. To make sense of liberalism the Turkish way we have to analyse it in the frame of free market policies introduced and controlled by an authoritarian state.² This means that it is highly questionable how free the market really is, a point that the EU has stressed on numerous occasions in reports on Turkey’s progress towards an eventual membership (Commission of the European Communities 2002; 2003; 2004).

Despite the liberal rhetoric of Özal and his cohorts, the Turkish state didn’t get any smaller in the 1980s. The share of public investment in total investment actually increased until 1988, mainly because of increased public investment in infrastructure (Buğra 1994:144). In 1979 the relative shares of the public and private sectors in total fixed investment were 49,7 and 50,3 per cent respectively. Comparable numbers for 1987 were 53,5 and 46,7 per cent respectively (Buğra 1994:144). But more important than the actual size of the state is the fact that there was a general lack of clearly defined legal principles for state intervention and lack of transparency in the economic manoeuvring of the government. This is a rather complex issue involving frequent changes in the legislation that regulates the tax system, the foreign trade regime and the relationship between the state and the private sector, combined with sudden turnarounds in the economic policies.³ In connection with my analysis it is interesting to note that there was a substantial increase in the power of the executive during this period. According to Buğra (1994:145) a number of key agencies responsible for strategic decision-making and policy implementation were created within the office of the Prime Minister. This expansion of centralized power was made at the expense of the judiciary and the parliament.

² Lee (2000), Park, Kim & Sohn (2000) and Nain (2000) have followed the same approach in studies of media in other authoritarian neo-liberal societies like Taiwan, South Korea and Malaysia.

³ See Krueger & Aktan (1992), Buğra (1994) and Aydın (2005) for analyses of this complex web of changes.

The so-called “extra-budgetary funds” can serve as example of how this expansion of power was realised. These funds – or “shadow budgets” – were created through the diversion of tax resources from the parliament-controlled budget by introducing specific levies imposed as a surcharge on different activities and items (Zürcher 2004:311). The government thus had large funds at its disposal, estimated to range between USD 3,5 and 5,7 billion in 1987-1988 (Buğra 1994:145), which the parliament had no control over. According to Buğra (1994:145), this was in “perfect conformity with the MP’s strictly pragmatic approach which involved a clear disregard for the rule of law whenever there was even the slightest conflict between legal provisions and the requirements of goal directed action”. The general lack of clearly defined legal principles for the use of these funds created a complex environment for investors and businessmen. The presence of the state in the economy was felt more than anywhere else in this type of “discretionary meddling introducing an overwhelming degree of uncertainty in the business environment” (Buğra 1994:146). The extra-budgetary funds and the general lack of transparency in the use of public finances has been a main grievance of the EU Commission in its annual evaluations on Turkey’s progress towards accession (Commission of the European Communities 2002; 2003; 2004). And it is easy to understand why. Although money from these funds has been hard to trace, there are documented cases of such money being channelled towards government-friendly business interests, among them the conglomerates that control the mainstream media. Buğra (1994:153) argues that the resources accumulated in the largest of these funds – the *Konut Fonu* (Housing Fund) – were mainly channelled towards a few firms. This fund was fed from import duties on luxury items and a USD 100 charge levied on all Turkish citizens travelling abroad (Zürcher 2004:311).

4.4. Cases

“... the anxieties that gripped the Istanbul rich of my childhood were not unfounded, their discretion not unwise. The state bureaucracy maintained a greedy interest in all aspects of production, and because it was impossible to become seriously wealthy without entering into deals with politicians, everyone assumed that even the “well-meaning” rich had tainted pasts.” (Pamuk 2005:171-172)

Orhan Pamuk’s description of the Istanbul of his youth has no direct link with the workings of the modern media moguls in Turkey. But Pamuk paints a vivid picture of the seemingly interminable tentacles of the Turkish state, and people’s constant fear of falling into the ruling

elites disfavour. As the next paragraphs will show it has paid off to have cordial relations with the strong men – and one woman – that have governed the country.

4.4.1. Subsidies

When Dinç Bilgin launched the daily *Sabah* in 1985 he was hailed as a hero for the exposure of financial scandals engulfing Turgut Özal, and his newspaper quickly became a bestseller. However, the investigations into the shady dealings of the Premier were stifled when Özal “shovelled out some \$ 3 billion-worth of subsidies to newspapers in a Faustian deal”,⁴ the lion’s share going to Bilgin’s *Sabah* Group and the Doğan Group. Both groups invested in new high-tech printing plants. “Such was the sudden opulence at *Sabah* that an ex-employee recalls ‘relieving myself in imported Italian porcelain’.”⁵ Özal himself boasted of using the economic power of state advertising for personal political advantage (Pope 2004:212).

Press subsidies are a common feature in many countries. They can be given as cash grants or as tax exemption or reduction. In Norway press subsidies are institutionalised to give media outlets a degree of financial predictability. The system was introduced to preserve media diversity, and smaller outlets and outlets that support minority views are given first priority. The subsidies are included in the national budgets, and are thus subject to the same transparency criteria and budgetary control mechanisms as other public expenditures. The kind of subsidies Özal handed out to newspapers in the 1980s does not fit this pattern of predictability and transparency. Neither was the money given to support struggling minority outlets, but rather to the major players. In many ways this represent a kind of converse press subsidy, and the same pattern is visible in subsidies shovelled out in the 1990s. Between 1991 and 1993, Tansu Çiller, then Minister of State in charge of economics in the coalition government of Süleyman Demirel,⁶ offered a total of 3,2 trillion Turkish Lira (TRL) to the media, according to Nozawa-Dursun (1997:89-90).⁷ The figure included a 100 per cent exemption from VAT and customs for imported goods, and credits with a 30 per cent interest rate against the 115 per cent inflation rate of the market. Large outlets like *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*,

⁴ The Economist (2001): *Dark Morning in Turkey*. 359 (8216). 36

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Süleyman Demirel (b. 1924) has served as Prime Minister in Turkey five times, the first from 1965 to 1969, the last from 1991 to 1993, when he became Turkey’s 9th President. Ahmet Necdet Sezer succeeded him in 2000.

⁷ Due to the chronic instability of the TRL I have not been able to find the exact amount in USD at the time. The closest I have come is that TRL 3,2 trillion on 1 January 1994 was approx. USD 215 million. That it at the time of writing amount to USD 2,4 million needs no further comment. As of 1 January 2005 Turkey has slashed six zeroes of its currency and introduced the New Turkish Lira (TRY). At the time of writing TRY 1 was USD 0,75.

Sabah and *Türkiye* received the major share of these funds. “No leftist or intellectual paper was included in this ‘encouragement’ from the government” (Nozawa-Dursun 1997:90).

What is also interesting to note is that subsidies like these conspicuously often have been handed out prior to elections. The government of Tansu Çiller, who became prime minister in 1993, channelled at least USD 1 million worth of state bank ads to the media in the six months preceding the election in 1995. 60 per cent of this money went to the leading publishing groups at the time, the *Sabah* Group and the Doğan Group.⁸ Media outlets critical of Çiller’s government received a very small part of these funds, while certain small dailies supportive of her, such as *Gölge Adam* (Shadow Man), received a sizable slice of the pie.

As an example of the power various governments have wielded over the media due to financial subsidies, Nozawa-Dursun (1997:90) points to Tansu Çiller’s appearance on close to all television stations simultaneously on 19 January 1995. The Premier’s announcement was a response to a question of the Turkish Employer’s Association: an important announcement for those concerned, but hardly important enough to attract the attention of every broadcaster at the same time. Nozawa-Dursun (1997:90) claims that Çiller was able to pull this off because of the aforementioned credits the broadcasters’ parent companies had obtained from the government. The government in other words had considerable leverage over the media companies through money handed out as credits, subsidies and public advertising, money the Premier personally could distribute through the extra-budgetary funds. Various premiers have also been prone to take advantage of the subsidies on newsprint for personal political gain. Turgut Özal is reported to have told an *Anavatan Partisi* (ANAP; Motherland Party) congress: “I know when to put up the price of newsprint” (Pope 2004:212), indicating that he was willing to go a long way to stifle and punish media outlets that criticised his policies.

4.4.2. Preferred reporters

“Journalists where going to visits, business trips, to different countries, on the same plane. Of course they were writing about it, in their columns etc. And they still do. But that tradition started with Özal. Özal encouraged them, basically the ones that supported him. And he refused the ones that didn’t support him. That’s sad. There was a quotation from him: “I like rich men.” That means he encouraged all the bribery. Another quote from him says: “My

⁸ Balci, Kemal (1997): “Four state banks showered ads on the media prior to the election.” http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/oldeitions.php?dir=05_13_97&fn=dom.htm (29.11.2005)

citizens know how to get around.” That means: Unless you’re not caught, you can go ahead and do anything you want: Bribery etc. That’s crazy coming from a prime minister. It explains the mentality.”⁹

Preferential treatment of media outlets and reporters is a fact of life almost everywhere. But in Turkey there are no institutionalised checks and balances to control or curb such activity. Most Western governments have certain legally binding obligations and duties to disclose information in a non-partisan manner. It is quite clear from Özal’s way of handing out information to certain hand-picked reporters that such obligations had little relevance in Turkey.¹⁰ The most obvious example is that he used to telephone favoured reporters to give them exclusive news. This practice is confirmed by the fact that these reporters used to brag about these phone calls in their stories or columns. Özal’s practice was so commonly known that it even acquired its own name in its specific Turkish context: “telephone journalism” (Demirkent 1995:97). The Premier did nothing to conceal his bias, and denied exclusive information to news organisations he regarded as more critical towards his government. This left them in a competitive disadvantage compared with the Premier’s preferred cohorts.

The fact that Turkey is a democracy where governments come and go means that the various deals and understandings between the political and the economic elite have to be renegotiated from time to time. Not all Turkish prime ministers that have served since the army returned Turkey to civilian rule in 1983 have been in a position to attract and control the most powerful media conglomerates and prominent columnists. The most notable example is Necmettin Erbakan, prime minister in a coalition government with Tansu Çiller from 1996 to 1997. Erbakan, who was Turkey’s first Islamist prime minister, declared war on what he called the country’s media cartel.¹¹ In addition to full support from his party’s mouthpiece *Milli Gazete* (National Newspaper), he received favourable coverage in other Islamist-friendly newspapers like *Türkiye* and *Yeni Şafak*.¹² But the response from the secular mainstream media he was targeting was swift and merciless. Although Turkey’s anti-Islamism generals played the main role in ejecting Erbakan from office, they were given plenty of help from Doğan and Bilgin controlled media in turning public opinion against the new government.

⁹ Aslı Tunç, interview with author, Kadıköy, Istanbul 18 July 2005.

¹⁰ On 9 October 2003 the Law 4982 on the Right to Obtain Information, which allowed citizens to demand information from the state institutions, was approved (Çatalbaş 2005:14).

¹¹ *The Economist* (2002): *Face Value: A Turkish Rupert Murdoch*. 362 (8260). 70.

¹² The moderate Islamist Fethullah Gülen Movement, which controls the influential daily *Zaman*, has emphatically supported the secular state. Their relations with the *RP* have been strained. (Zürcher 2004:291)

The media campaign against Erbakan and his *Refah Partisi* (*RP*; Welfare Party) started in earnest when the party won the municipal elections in Istanbul, Ankara and many other Turkish cities on 27 March 1994. The campaign went so far that the state minister in Erbakan's short-lived government, Abdullah Gül, argued that the media was "acting like a political party".¹³ There are many examples of ethically dubious campaign journalism on part of the secular media. The hysteria that followed the sentencing of 41 Turks to death in Saudi Arabia in August 1995 on charges of drug smuggling is one. The first report announced that the sentenced Turks probably would be beheaded. Implicit in the hundreds of reports in the secular media was a message to Turkish voters that this kind of barbarism would befall them to if the *RP* came to power. "TV screens were flooded with images of decapitation: men kneeling down with arms tightly tied back and covered, submitting bared necks to the cut of the sword" (Navaro-Yashin 2002:51). The fact that the secular political elite in Turkey – including the army – was highly sceptical of Erbakan's government goes a long way in explaining why the secular media dared to attack the *RP* with such force. To fully understand the new dynamics created by the Islamists' rise to political power, we must investigate the case of the present Islamist oriented government led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

4.4.3. Erdoğan and the AKP

The same Abdullah Gül who was quoted in the preceding paragraph is currently Foreign Minister in the moderate Islamist *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (*AKP*; Justice and Development Party) government. Both Erdoğan and Gül took a lot of beating in the secular mainstream media in the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium. After *AKP* took office in 2002, the barrage has died down. Both men have instead been cheered in their effort to move Turkey closer to membership in the EU. The seemingly insurmountable ideological barriers of yesterday are almost forgotten. How can this be?

*"Because they are very real-political. They say: 'now he is elected. At least for four years he will hold the power. So instead of struggle, let's make peace and benefit as much as we can.' It's real-political, no principal behaviour. Most of the media owners take the position according to the conjuncture."*¹⁴

¹³ Turkish Daily News (1997): "Gül: Media acts like opposition party".
http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/olddeditions.php?dir=05_13_97&fn=Dom2.htm (29.11.2005)

¹⁴ Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

Mustafa Sönmez has no illusions regarding the motives of the media moguls. According to him the “*conjuncture*” was not in Erbakan’s favour in the late 1990s. The generals didn’t disguise the fact that they didn’t support his government. With Erdoğan’s *AKP* government it’s a different game. The generals have not rattled their sabres in the way they did in 1997.

The economist and author Mustafa Sönmez has been a staunch critic of the neo-liberal economic policies for decades. He has his office on the top floor of a five-storey apartment block in Kabataş, with panoramic view over the Bosphorus to the Asian side of Istanbul. On the afternoon at the day of our interview he was going to a televised debate on the privatisation plans of a very attractive piece of seaside land at Haydarpaşa, close to the popular shopping district of Kadıköy on the Asian side. Sönmez believes that the privatisation of public property in Istanbul only serves the rich. And as long as the *AKP* government and the *AKP* controlled municipalities continue the privatisation policies instigated in the 1980s, the business elite will be satisfied. One can also argue that the generals' tacit accept of the *AKP* have enhanced the status of the party and made the moderate Islamists a more accepted part of the Turkish political field. It is thus a somewhat bigger gamble for the mainstream media to launch an all out attack on the present government than it was to criticise Erbakan’s government. The fact that the charismatic and down-to-earth Erdoğan has become an increasingly popular person, is also a fact of matter in this case.

Aslı Tunç agrees that the media’s attitude towards politicians change according to the stature and position of the politicians.

“They have to be in good relations with the political establishment to get some subsidies etc. These bosses don’t challenge the political establishment. For example, they are all in favour of Tayyip now. He was the mayor of Istanbul and most of the mainstream newspapers were criticising that man. But after he became prime minister everything changed. They are spineless. They don’t know any concrete ideology or any worldview. They don’t have any concerns about real journalism. That’s the sad part. I teach at a media department. I try to educate students to go into this sector, and I know the realities of this sector. So those kids are criticising and know what’s going on, and they don’t want to be a part of this system.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Aslı Tunç, interview with author, Kadıköy, Istanbul 18 July 2005.

Aslı Tunç is assistant professor at the Media and Communication Systems Department at Istanbul Bilgi University. She is an outspoken critic of the Turkish corporate press, and she believes that the outright bribery and more subtle favouritism that has characterised the relationship between media owners and various Turkish governments the last few decades are one of the worst effects of the concentration of ownership in Turkish media. Tunç wrote her PhD at Temple University in Philadelphia on the functions of political cartoonists in the Turkish democratisation process. She returned to Turkey on 11 September 2001 to start her new job in Istanbul. “*I was one of the last people who left the States that day,*” she says during our interview at a pleasant teahouse in Kadıköy. She thinks it’s ironic that she was inspired to sharpen her critical attitude towards corporate media in the years preceding the terrorist attack that in many ways reversed the critical attitude of the US media.

There is another point to be made about the role of political Islam in Turkey. The aforementioned Erbakan has been a mainstay of the religious wing of Turkish politics since the 1970s. He has been the leader of a series of political parties that have risen to prominence only to be banned by the country’s secular authorities.¹⁶ In the 1990s a new generation of Islamist oriented politicians began to take centre stage, and the charismatic Erdoğan became the movement’s spearhead.¹⁷ After the soft coup in June 1997, when Erbakan was forced to step down, and the subsequent banning of his moderate Islamist *RP* in January 1998, the Turkish Islamist movement entered a period of instability that in the end resulted in a split in the party’s ranks. The *gelenekçiler* (traditionalists) wanted to remain true to the movement’s more traditional religious leanings, while the *yenilikçiler* (renewalists), led by Erdoğan, wanted to let go of the religious rhetoric and instead adopt itself fully to a secular democratic system. The *yenilikçiler* formed the *AKP*, while the *gelenekçiler* formed the *Saadet Partisi* (*SP*; Felicity Party). *AKP* won a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections on 3 November 2002, while *SP* did not manage to pass the 10 per cent threshold. The split in the Islamist movement, and the performance of the *yenilikçiler* during the three years they have been at the helm, have led to a gradual decrease in the scepticism towards this younger

¹⁶ Erbakan founded his first Islam-oriented party, the *Milli Nizam Partisi* (National Order Party) in 1970. The army closed the party in May 1971, but Erbakan resumed his political activities when he formed the *Milli Selamet Partisi* (National Salvation Party) in October 1972. This party was suspended along with all other political parties after the coup in 1980. Erbakan’s next political invention was the *Refah Partisi* in 1983.

¹⁷ The reference to weapons took on a more literal meaning on 12 December 1997 when Erdoğan at a public meeting in Siirt in southeastern Turkey read a poem allegedly written by the prominent Pan-Turkist Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924) in which he stated: “*Mosques are our barracks, domes our helmets, minarets our bayonets, believers our soldiers.*” As a consequence, Erdoğan was tried and convicted of inciting religious hatred and sentenced to four months imprisonment. He did his time between March and July 1999.

generation of Islamist politicians. It is important to understand this development if one is to make sense of the fact that the *AKP* has received far less criticism from the mainstream media than its predecessor *RP*. But some still believe that the democratic rhetoric of Erdoğan and his *yenilikçiler* is a smokescreen to hide the fact that they are gradually islamising the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the educational system.¹⁸ One of them is Editor-in-chief Mehmet T. Sucu of *Cumhuriyet*. Asked about whom he perceives as his paper's worst enemy, the media moguls personified by Aydın Doğan, or the *AKP* personified by Erdoğan, he answers both.

“Vocationally it is Aydın Doğan. Ideologically it’s Erdoğan. Both of them are dangerous for us. Doğan is going to make a monopoly. He brings new rules to journalism. He is killing the newspapers. Erdoğan, even though he doesn’t admit it, has a religious mentality. He is against social democrats.¹⁹ We are fighting against two enemies at the same time, and they are intertwined. Because the big capital wants to be close to the government, they are also attacking us. But everything is not bad. Before Erdoğan we sold fewer newspapers than we do today. Before him it was about 40 000. Today it is nearly 60 000.”²⁰

The good-humoured editor is full of anecdotes. His personal favourite is the lawsuit brought against *Cumhuriyet* by Erdoğan after the newspaper’s political cartoonist Musa Kart drew the Prime Minister as a cat entangled in a ball of wool in February 2005. A court in Ankara fined the cartoonist 5000 New Turkish Liras (USD 3700) for “publicly humiliating the Prime Minister”.²¹ The case caused a lot of criticism in Turkey, and *Cumhuriyet* got support from many of its conglomerate rivals, including the Doğan owned *Radikal*²² and *Hürriyet*²³. They also got a lot of financial support from various sources, according to Sucu.²⁴ He claims that *Cumhuriyet* actually ended up getting more money from sympathisers than they had to pay in fines. In addition they got a lot of publicity. “*It was free advertisement*”, chuckles Suncu. Every time I mention that they made money on their arch rival, he seems pleasantly amused.

¹⁸ At the time of writing there is a row over Erdoğan’s decision to name Adnan Büyükdeniz, former head of an interest-free Islamic finance house, as central-bank chief. *The Economist* (2006): *Turkey’s wobble: A crescent that could also wane*. 379 (8471). 27.

¹⁹ Atatürk’s old *CHP*, the party *Cumhuriyet* used to be a mouthpiece for, is regarded as the main social democratic party in Turkey. Secularism has always been one of the core political principles of the *CHP*.

²⁰ Mehmet T. Sucu, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

²¹ Frazer, Susan (2005): “*Turkish fury as Erdogan, champion of free speech, sues over cartoon*” <http://news.independent.co.uk/europe/article4421.ece> (30.11.2005)

²² Alkan, Türker (2005): “*Seni gidi basın seni...*” (You devil press) <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=144719> (30.11.2005)

²³ Ekşi, Oktay (2005): “*Dünya değişti...*” (The world has changed) <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=299255> (30.11.2005)

²⁴ Mehmet T. Sucu, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

It seems clear that trade-off of the kind I outline in this chapter is dependent upon the position and status of the factions of the political elite that rule the country at any given time. The example of Erbakan indicates that the most important variable in this relationship is the attitude of the generals. If the generals have grievances towards a government, it becomes less likely that this government can instigate an effective trade-off regime to curb media criticism. When the generals kept quiet after *AKP*'s landslide victory in 2002, the mainstream media almost overnight dropped their critical attitude against the party.

4.4.4. Direct links

The most obvious link between a prime minister and the media in Turkey after 1980 is the case of the television channel *Star*, owned by Cem Uzan and Turgut Özal's son, Ahmet. As mentioned earlier *Star* became the first private channel in Turkey when it was launched 1 March 1990.²⁵ Turgut Özal indirectly sanctioned the launching of *Star* by claiming in an interview in 1990 that the broadcasting legislation in Turkey did not outlaw satellite channels (Çatalbaş 2000:127). The fact that effective legislation to regulate the new private television market was not implemented until 1993 shows that this was highly contested. But an effect of Özal's statement was that electronic media overnight became a highly promising field of investment, something that benefited his son.²⁶ According to Nicole and Hugh Pope (2004:206), "Star Television turned out to be an ice-breaker for an information revolution in Turkey, but it was also a thoroughly political move". They relate this to the fact that Özal's popularity was waning at the time, and that the launching of *Star* by a trusted member of the family was part of a public relations scheme to enhance his status.

There are many other more or less well-documented cases of direct links between the political elite and media conglomerates. They range from the cosy personal relations between Aydın Doğan and former premier and deputy premier Mesut Yılmaz,²⁷ presently on trial for rigging the privatisation of the state owned *Türkbank* in favour of a businessman with alleged ties to the Turkish Mafia, to more subtle connections. When Yılmaz became prime minister in 1997, a Doğan owned company was awarded a lucrative energy contract, according to İlnur Çevik

²⁵ See paragraph 2.2.3.

²⁶ In the end Ahmet Özal was outwitted in his television partnership. He fell deeply into debt, was charged with corruption and lived in exile for a year. (Pope 2004:212)

²⁷ Mesut Yılmaz (b.1947) was Prime Minister three times during the 1990s. From 1999 to 2002 he served as deputy prime minister in Bülent Ecevit's coalition government. He became leader of the *ANAP* after Özal's death.

because Yılmaz wanted to reward Doğan for his support.²⁸ The contract was cancelled by the Supreme Court in 1999 because it violated a law that said that any person or company who owns more than 10 per cent of a TV-station is not eligible to enter such contracts with the state. This was the first time the Supreme Court had descended on this widespread illegal practice. The Yılmaz government “was fully aware that these media barons owned more than 10 per cent shares in radio and TV stations and under Turkish law could not participate in any state contracts”.²⁹ After the contract had been awarded, the government opted to change the law, but parliament refused. Nevertheless, two years later the ban was lifted.

4.4.5. Government tenders

The Turkish Parliament’s decision in 2001 to lift the ban on media bosses participating in state tenders and stock exchange transactions was controversial. In addition to strong objections from the opposition, a deputy from one of then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit’s own *Demokratik Sol Parti* (Democratic Left Party), Uluc Gurkan, submitted two separate proposals arguing for the continuation of the ban. Gurkan, a former journalist, argued that the lifting of the ban “would lead to monopolization in the media, a tarnishing of politics-media relations and the end to a multi-voice democracy”.³⁰ Aslı Tunç agrees that the lifting of the ban have made the relations between politicians and media bosses even more shady.

*“Now those people can bid on state tenders. That’s something very dangerous. You cannot keep your distance if your boss is bidding on a state tender. And there are so many things going on in those state tenders. I mean, how can you criticise anything, or report anything on those issues. I mean, it’s absurd.”*³¹

The outspoken scholar believes that the lack of transparency in the dealings between the politicians and the economic elite is one of the major weaknesses of the Turkish democracy. *“It’s about people having a right to know, as citizens. We have a right to know what’s going on behind closed doors and in the state. Basically it’s harming the citizens. Many of the citizens are clueless. There are no brave journalists, and I cannot blame them.”*³²

²⁸ Çevik, İlnur (1999): “...and the press barons had to bow to justice”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11762> (04.02.2006)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Turkish Daily News (2001): “RTUK Bill postponed until next week”.
http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/olddeditions.php?dir=06_01_01&fn=dom.htm (13.12.2005)

³¹ Aslı Tunç, interview with author, Kadıköy, Istanbul 18 July 2005.

³² Ibid.

The fact that the state plays such a large part in the Turkish economy makes this situation even graver. Big money is in circulation in these tenders, and without a satisfying degree of transparency and objective reporting the public cannot know what lies behind a decision to award a contract to a conglomerate with interests in the media sector. “If the owner of the channel wanted to win a privatisation tender, pro-Government discourse would flood the news and current affairs programs, while investigative news teams would unearth material against their rivals”, according to Open Society Institute (2005:1575).

4.5. Journalistic professionalism

Journalism has gradually become institutionalised as a distinct profession and an academic discipline. This is a fact of life in most Western countries, and many universities in Turkey also offer courses and degrees in Journalism. The development towards a distinct journalistic identity has given birth to what may be termed journalistic professionalism. It follows from this that there now exists a large body of books and studies on journalism, and that there has been a development towards a more uniform professional ethic, and more universally agreed journalistic methods. The amount of legislation and written professional codes that regulate journalistic practice varies from country to country. In Turkey there has been a large body of law that have regulated what reporters can and cannot write, and what editors can and cannot publish. In most Western countries this kind of legislation is now limited to a few areas concerning issues like national security and libel. Both US and EU legislation clearly states that there should be weighty reasons to limit the media’s freedom of expression. Self-enforced professional codes of ethics and public regulatory agencies like ombudsman and competition authorities have taken the place of restrictive press laws in the West. This means that there exists something resembling a social contract between the media, the state and the public, where the privately owned media is expected to create institutions that enforce these self-administered codes and punish violators. As argued earlier in this chapter, many of the forces applied in developed capitalist societies that regulate the effects of private ownership are often absent in late-industrialising societies, many of which are characterised by authoritarian state structures. In Turkey this is also the case, and it creates a vacuum where powerful players can control the agenda and make informal agreements and trade-offs. As a consequence, the system is less transparent, less codified and less egalitarian. This is an important argument, because it helps explain why ownership concentration in the media is a more serious threat to diversity and pluralism in Turkey than in the West at present.

It is important to note that the system of self-regulation adopted in the West is controversial. Critics argue that as long as self-enforcement carries no punishment other than mere criticism, it does not have the necessary deterrent effect. They also argue that the system is more beneficial for the media than the public because the media now has a freer hand in running their business without interference from public authorities. But one cannot escape the conclusion that the media owners by accepting such a system implicitly declares that they have a responsibility that goes beyond lining their own pockets. The existence of a professional code of ethics means that there are some boundaries that cannot be crossed if the media establishment wants to avoid criticism that can damage its standing, and thus be detrimental to commercial goals. It also means that the media business is closely monitored, and that there is an open and dynamic debate about infringements.

Aslı Tunç is a staunch believer in a more codified system in Turkey. She believes that the lack of written rules is imbedded in the Turkish culture. “*We Turks don’t like to write things down. We don’t like anything that is structured. So everything is in the air. We are defenders of oral culture*”, she claims.³³ That is why she hopes that Turkey someday will gain entrance to the inner sanctum of the EU. “*There will be codes, and there will be an ombudsman to watch over certain things. So everything will be monitored. That will be something very good for this country. Otherwise, nobody cares.*”

Some might rightly argue that the picture I have painted here is a bit too colourless. And to be fair there are many people who work to make improvements, among them the various journalist unions in Turkey. They have jointly produced a 32-page pocket-sized booklet called *Türkiye Gazetecileri Hak ve Sorumluluk Bildirgesi* (Turkish Journalists’ Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities) that is handed out to all union members. The booklet is both an introduction to the general ethics of the profession, and an introduction to the workings of liberal press freedom. The authors have deemed it necessary to underline that “the responsibility of the journalist to the public supersedes all other responsibilities, including to employer and public authorities”, and that “information, news and free thought are of a social nature that separates them from all other commercial commodities and services” (Türkiye Gazetecileri Cemiyeti 1998:13).³⁴ This might sound like a matter of course, but according to

³³ Aslı Tunç, interview with author, Kadıköy, Istanbul 18 July 2005.

³⁴ Translated by author.

president Ercan S. Ipekçi of the *Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendekası* (TGS; Union of Turkish Journalists) it is not.

*“Turkish journalists are not free to do their work. The government is limiting freedom, and the relationship between the media bosses and the public authorities are restraining the movement of the journalists. Because of the pressure on journalists to comply with the wishes of the bosses we have changed the statutes of the union. Whoever becomes a member of a journalist union will have to accept these new codes.”*³⁵

Only about 29 per cent of Turkish journalists are members of the union, and only a small part of these, some 4000, are active members. Because most of the major media owners deny their employees to join a union, the TGS actually have more members than they do declare. *“Being in a union is related to a persons awareness of his rights. Many journalists are aware of this, and they come to join. But if their boss learns of it, they will have a problem. Therefore we protect them by not declaring their names”*, Ipekçi explains.³⁶

Encouraging journalistic professionalism in an environment where the employers can dictate the terms of employment, and legal protection for employees is almost non-existent, is not easy. According to Ipekçi, the government sides with the media bosses when there are conflicts of interest between employers and employees. *“We get no support from the AKP-government. The government doesn’t want to lose its good relationship with the media.”*³⁷

To be fair with the politicians it has to be mentioned that many parliamentarians have voiced complaints about the state of the corporate owned media. In 2002 the Turkish parliament adopted a motion to investigate the problems of the press, and a parliamentary committee consisting of 13 members was established to do the work.³⁸ The monopolisation of the press and the ethics of journalism were the two main areas of investigation. Some suggested that the press should establish its own ethical values, something the journalist organisations already had done, while others suggested laws restricting media owners from owning companies in other business sectors. The public’s right to neutral and objective information was also raised.

³⁵ Ercan S. Ipekçi, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Turkish Daily News (2002): *“Parliament adopts inquiry motion into problems of the press”*
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=27722> (04.02.2006)

The committee's work did not result in any significant changes, but it is interesting to note that Doğan controlled outlets in the aftermath of the inquiry published their own code of ethics. The group also has its own ethics board, and the ethical codes its media outlets have to adhere to is quite strict, at least on paper.³⁹

4.6. Concluding remarks

The troubles facing the Turkish journalist unions will be analysed in chapter six. Here it is important to stress that the fate of the unions is closely tied to the fact that the decision makers in Turkish society, a handful of major political and economic players, have no interest in losing their grip on power and their means to set the agenda. This fits the pattern of a system of trade-off outlined in this chapter. An effective trade-off regime that benefits both the political and the economic elite is dependent upon reducing the amount of powerful players. Otherwise the playing field will appear overcrowded and too complex and the direct lines of communication between the two parties will become blurred. Letting more players onto the field will presuppose clear guidelines and rules to control the game, a development that will be detrimental to the major players in contemporary Turkey. A powerful elite in other words has a clear interest in nursing the trade-off-arrangement, and resisting attempts to level the playing field by introducing more transparency and more democratic rules. A clear example of this was the major media campaign against Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist government in 1996 and 1997, after he declared war on what he called the country's "media cartel".⁴⁰ Most of the criticism against Erbakan's government was articulated as fear of an Islamist takeover of the democratic institutions of Turkey. This fear might have been more or less real, but the fact that the media campaign was launched immediately after Erbakan declared his "war", pretty much speaks for itself. The major media owners felt that Erbakan threatened their position, and they used the means at their disposal to fight his government. This was in clear understanding with the generals and other powerful people in the secular political and economic establishment at the time.

³⁹ The code of ethics can be found at: <http://www.dyh.com.tr/eng/Detail.asp?CatID=1&SubCatID=3&ID=20> (06.02.2006)

⁴⁰ See paragraph 4.4.2.

Chapter V: Political weapon

“Turkey belongs to the Turks!” “We don’t need you, IMF!”¹ The slogans of far-right media tycoon Cem Uzan’s *Genç Parti* (Youth Party) in the campaign leading up to the Turkish elections in November 2002 reek of populism and unabashed nationalism. The 7,2 per cent of the vote the party received chiefly came from poor and disillusioned young Turks – the electorate the wealthy and successful Uzan was targeting with his massive campaign (Özel 2003:163-164). Two years earlier the same Uzan had bought a multi-million-pound house in London. To get access to the higher echelons of British society he employed a public-relations firm. A donation of GBD 400 000 to one of Prince Charles’ charities was enough to get him invited to dinners at Buckingham Palace and Highgrove, the prince’s country estate, where Uzan’s wife Alara allegedly sat next to the prince himself.² Investing in seven apartments in Manhattan’s luxurious Trump Tower and several yachts and aircrafts in the late 1990s was another move to boost his image as a successful citizen of the world.³ Uzan’s life back then was about as far from the deprived conditions of his future voters as possible.

There is a world of difference between the Uzan family’s standing in 2000 and 2002. The meltdowns in 2000 and 2001 is part of the explanation, irregularities another. The family’s mobile phone carrier *Telsim* started to default on loans to the mobile phone giants Nokia and Motorola in June 2001, and by January 2002 charges were filed in New York.⁴ That was the beginning of the end of the Uzans’ business empire. When petitions to appear in court arrived from various countries, Cem Uzan took up politics. In an attempt to be elected to parliament, and thus gain parliamentary immunity, Uzan practically “hijacked” the *Genç Parti*, founded by Hasan Celal Güzel.⁵ The image as a liberal citizen of the world who dined with European royalty was toned down. Uzan instead staked his bets on travelling the country, delivering simple and populist speeches, distributing free lunch to the poor, and staging big shows to boost his party. In his speeches he tapped into the anti-western and anti-establishment feelings of the deprived in Turkish society, feelings that had gained in strength in tandem with the crisis that hit the country’s wage earners and unemployed hard. Many saw Uzan’s reluctance to appear in Western courts as a brave stance against Western economic imperialism.

¹ Purvis, Andrew (2003): “Not just business as usual”. In *Time Europe Magazine*. 162 (5).

² Revill, Jo (2003): “Charles in ‘cash for access’ claims”
http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,6903,906039,00.html (07.02.2006)

³ The Economist (2003): *Face Value: Turkey’s Berlusconi?* 366 (8314). 66.

⁴ See paragraph 3.5.1.

⁵ Çevik, İlnur (2003): “Political shield did not work”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=32889> (06.02.2006)

The case of Cem Uzan is the most extreme example in Turkey of a media owner that has used media outlets to further personal political ambitions. Uzan consistently declined interviews to news outlets he did not own, and turned his own outlets into mere propaganda machines. According to Aslı Tunç, Uzan was “*a bad imitation of Berlusconi*”.⁶ Even the lucrative commercial breaks during the UEFA Champions League broadcasts, to which *Star TV* held the rights, were used solely for the *Genç Parti*’s political broadcasts (Open Society Institute 2005:1576). According to İlnur Çevik, “they used their media empire to spread false information and also insult everyone opposed to them...”.⁷ With its 7,2 per cent of the vote the *Genç Parti* did not manage to pass the 10 per cent threshold, but it still was an impressive achievement for a three months old party lacking a grassroots organisation and electoral base. Uzan’s use of his own media empire undoubtedly explains why so many Turks voted for him.

Although Cem Uzan himself on various occasions has denied that he interferes with editorial decisions,⁸ many editors and reporters of the Uzan owned daily *Star* resigned in August 2003 when Uzan in a speech to staff criticised them for not standing firm enough against the allegations against himself and his family. Editor-in-chief Fatih Çekirge was among the people who quit because of Uzan’s continuing interference in editorial matters.⁹ Uzan’s speech to his staff was made following a controversy over a public speech he had made in Bursa in June the same year, where he accused premier Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of attacking the Uzans’ business interests in order to harm Cem Uzan politically. The controversial businessman and politician accused Erdoğan of “treachery” and of being “Godless”. The speech was printed in *Star* at the owner’s request.¹⁰ The newspaper in November had to pay Erdoğan TRL 25 billion (USD 18 250) in compensation for “deliberately having demeaned his personality”.¹¹ The *Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu (RTÜK*; Supreme Board of Radio and Television) also halted the broadcasts of *Star TV*, *Kanal 6*, *Star Max*, *Star 6* and *Star 8*,

⁶ Aslı Tunç, interview with author, Kadıköy, Istanbul 18 July 2005.

⁷ Çevik, İlnur (2003): “*The Uzan empire is crumbling*”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=33206> (06.02.2006)

⁸ For examples see: Purvis, Andrew (2003): “Not just business as usual”. In *Time Europe Magazine*. 162 (5); The Economist (2003): *Face Value: Turkey’s Berlusconi?* 366 (8314). 66.

⁹ International Press Institute (2004): *2003 World Press Freedom Review*.
<http://www.freemedia.at/wpfr/Europe/turkey.htm> (01.02.2006); Türkiye Gazeteciler Cemiyeti (2003): “Fatih Çekirge *Star*’dan ayrıldı” (Fatih Çekirge left *Star*), in *Ağustos 2003 Basın Raporu* (August 2003 Press Report).
http://www.tec.org.tr/basin_raporlari/rapor8.htm (01.02.2006)

¹⁰ Turkish Daily News (2003): “*Uzan in trouble for insolent speech, privatization policies debated*”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=32642> (06.02.2006)

¹¹ Turkish Daily News (2003): “*Star newspaper to pay Erdogan TL 25 bln in compensation*”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=34289> (06.02.2006)

owned by the Uzans, for one month each, claiming that Cem Uzan used the broadcasts in favour of unjust benefits for its owner.¹² The TV stations were continuously broadcasting Cem Uzan's Bursa speech. When the critical voices in Uzan's media ventures resigned, he was left with employees who went to great lengths to support their boss. When most of the belongings of the Uzan Group were transferred to the *TMSF* in February 2004, a number of staff members began a hunger strike live on television. Updates about the strikes were broadcast daily, and the newscasts were filled with Cem Uzan's speeches at party meetings criticising the Government (Open Society Institute 2005:1576). The hunger strike and the Uzan party line were dropped when the takeover was complete. Uzan and his supporters have ever since contended that the government's action against the Uzan business empire was a political move aimed at destroying a political rival. Although riding high in the poles in 2003, the *Genç Parti* won less than 3 per cent of the vote in the March 2004 local elections.¹³

5.1. Content control

Most of my interviewees believe the most plausible explanation to why businessmen invest in a non-profitable business like the media is that they want a tool to promote their own political visions and a weapon to threaten competitors and politicians. The case of Uzan is as mentioned the most extreme example. Other examples include cases of subtle manoeuvring to put pressure on the political establishment. This can take the form of a long-term ideological strategy to make society more business friendly, pressure from case to case in specific policy matters, or promotion of a specific political party. In all cases the desired outcomes are policies that are favourable to the business interests of the media owner. Yet other examples show that media outlets have been used to put a spanner in the works of competitors.

In the vernacular of Media Studies, this explanation in other words seeks to shed light on why and how media owners in Turkey indirectly or directly control and/or restrict media output. To fully understand the underlying motives behind this kind of manoeuvring it is important to keep in mind the multiactivity aspect of big Turkish conglomerates. The media owners make their fortunes in other businesses than the media, and many of these businesses are time and again involved in dealings with the state, either in the form of lucrative government contracts, or in the form of subsidies. Owning an outlet where you can communicate with and put

¹² Erduran, Ersan (2003): "*Public turn deaf ear to all, popularity of GP rises*" <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=33076> (06.02.2006)

¹³ Economist Intelligence Unit (2005): "*Country ViewsWire Turkey: Political Forces*" <http://www.economist.com/countries/Turkey/profile.cfm?folder=Profile-Political%20Forces> (06.02.2006)

pressure on the political establishment is by many investors seen as an important part of business in Turkey. The political weapon explanation consequently suggests that the media owners directly or indirectly have great leverage over the editorial content of their outlets. This reduces the free decision-making role of editors and reporters.

A method used in many countries to secure the independent role of editors is to separate ownership from control. Some countries have adopted editorial agreements that seek to prevent proprietors from influencing editorial content. In Norway such a policy has been in effect since 1953,¹⁴ and according to Doyle (2002:152) it appears to have met with success in securing the independence of editors. The issue of dismissal and replacement of editors and other key personnel is also essential. If an owner has the power to threaten dismissal and select new editors who share his political and ideological outlook, he can reshape the editorial policy without interfering directly with the content. The best defence against these kinds of influences is in my opinion to encourage the growth of a strong civil society where trade organisations have the means to stand up against undue interference from owners, while other professional groups closely monitor the performance of the media. But even if this is achieved, which I in the previous chapter argued is not the case in Turkey, determined media proprietors still have a range of strategies at their disposal to exert influence over the content. It is consequently impossible for any editorial agreement to fully guarantee the independence of editors and journalists. But it is better than having none.

5.1.1. Case: Aydın Doğan's involvement in politics

“Few people who have crossed swords with Mr Doğan have survived unscathed”, the Economist concluded in a portrait of Aydın Doğan in 2002.¹⁵ The powerful and controversial Turkish media baron has more than once been suspected of having a political agenda which he has used his media outlets to front. The campaign against Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist government in the late 1990s and his connections with secular politicians such as Mesut Yılmaz, both cases discussed in the previous chapter, are two examples. Mustafa Sönmez argues that Doğan has even been directly involved in setting up a political party to further his ambitions. According to Sönmez Doğan was one of the architects behind the *Yeni Türkiye Partisi* (YTP; New Turkey Party), founded in 2002 following a leadership crisis in the then

¹⁴ The declaration *Rights and Duties of the Editor* is a joint document agreed upon by The Norwegian Editors Association and National Association of Norwegian Newspapers. For an English translation, see: <http://www.nj.no/English/?module=Articles;action=Article.publicShow;ID=1709> (30.09.2005)

¹⁵ The Economist (2002): *Face Value: A Turkish Rupert Murdoch*. 362 (8260). 70.

ruling social democratic *Demokratik Sol Parti (DSP; Democratic Left Party)* of Bülent Ecevit. The most pro-liberal wing in this party formed the *YTP*. Their vision was to create a modern pro-business social democratic party along the lines of Tony Blair's New Labour. Prominent people like Foreign Minister Ismail Cem, who became the party leader, and Minister of Economic Affairs Kemal Derviş, broke ranks with Prime Minister Ecevit, and the new party was initially received warmly by the public opinion. Cem and Derviş were dubbed Turkey's new "Dream Team",¹⁶ and the party got a lot of publicity in the secular mainstream media. When Derviş decided to leave the project because he recognized that it was a "head without a body" (Zürcher 2004:305), the party fell rapidly in the polls.¹⁷ *YTP* performed poorly, receiving only 1,2 per cent of the eligible votes cast in the November 2002 election. Commentators have argued that the forming of *YTP* actually worked to the detriment of the secular parties, because it made the voters more confused about which of the many centre-left or centre-right parties that would be the best alternative to the Islamist oriented *AKP*.¹⁸ The vote was thus split among the many parties, and only one, Atatürk's old *CHP*, managed to pass the 10 per cent threshold along with the *AKP*.

How involved Doğan was in the process of setting up the party is disputed. According to Sönmez there is no doubt that the party was "a product of the Doğan Group" and "Aydın Doğan's idea".¹⁹ He argues that Doğan's chief motivation was to set up a party to fight the *AKP*. Few other sources mention Doğan as a main player, but it is clear that many prominent businessmen supported the party. Sönmez is one of the best informed researchers on media ownership in Turkey, and his words thus carry weight. Another point that strengthens his claim is the amount of coverage the party got prior to the election in Doğan controlled media.

Sönmez argues that the fate of the *YTP* indicates that there are limits to how much the media moguls actually can influence people's choices. He attributes this to the fact that the Turkish mainstream media has very little credibility, a claim that was substantiated by a major report on corruption published by the independent Turkish think-tank *Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı (TESEV; Turkish Economic and Social Research Foundation)*. The report concluded that journalism is at the bottom of the list of professions, ahead only of politics in

¹⁶ BBC News (2002): "Dervis tests Turkey's political waters". <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2187006.stm> (01.02.2006)

¹⁷ Kemal Derviş was appointed head of The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in May 2005.

¹⁸ Sazak, Derya (2002): "Derviş'e baraj uyarısı" (Threshold warning to Derviş).

<http://www.milliyet.com/2002/08/01/yazar/sazak.html> (01.02.2006)

¹⁹ Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

terms of credibility and respectability.²⁰ The same argument has been voiced by prominent people inside the corporate media itself. Nuri M. Çolakoğlu, chairman of the TV Broadcasters Association of Turkey and CEO of a production company owned by the Doğan Group,²¹ argues that all the criticism levelled against the *AKP* in the mainstream media prior to the November 2002 elections probably fuelled the party's electoral success. "As seen in that example media doesn't really have strong muscles in Turkey", Çolakoğlu argues.²²

5.1.1.1. Çiller vs Doğan

*"Çiller feels the newspapers and TV stations owned by the media barons are out to get her. It is rather ironic that those media barons got huge state funds to put up those media empires through state assistance, soft loans and special incentives provided to them by Çiller herself in the good old days when the lady was their guardian angel."*²³

Doğru Yol Partisi (DYP; True Path Party) leader Tansu Çiller collided head on with media tycoon Aydın Doğan on a talkshow on *NTV* two weeks prior to the elections in April 1999. Çiller made accusations of news manipulation against the Doğan owned daily *Milliyet*. She accused a certain group she referred to as the countries "media cartel" of conspiring against her following a speech she had made in Erzurum where she stated that "I am the guardian of your religion and devoutness".²⁴ According to Çiller, reporters from *Milliyet* tipped off the authorities that she had made use of religion in a political speech, an act that constitutes a crime in Turkey. The journalists then reported that the public prosecutor in Erzurum had started an investigation based on her statement. According to Çiller the reporters practically made up the news themselves. *NTV*'s editorial office managed to get Aydın Doğan on phone to reply to Çiller's accusations on air. "Accusations and counter accusations as well as insults flew in the air",²⁵ editor İlnur Çevik of Turkish Daily News remarked. Later Doğan appeared on the same channel in person, stating that if Çiller could back up her allegations with

²⁰ TESEV Electronic Newsletter (2001): *TESEV continues Anti-Corruption Drive*.
<http://www.tesev.org.tr/mart/mar2.html> (01.02.2006)

²¹ Nuri M. Çolakoğlu's long career includes assignments as assistant general manager of Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), news editor of the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, program director and general manager of *Show TV* and president and CEO of the news channels *NTV* and *CNN Türk*.

²² Nuri M. Çolakoğlu quoted from a lecture he gave at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, 2 April 2004. http://www.lightmillennium.org/2004_14th_issue/nmc_q_a_april2_04.html (13.02.2006)

²³ Çevik, İlnur (1999): "...and Çiller takes on the media baron"
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11928> (03.02.2006)

²⁴ Koru, Fehmi (1999): "*Media, lies and politicians*"
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11993> (03.02.2006)

²⁵ Çevik, İlnur (1999): "...and Çiller takes on the media baron".
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11928> (03.02.2006)

substantial evidence, he himself would proclaim *Milliyet*, his own newspaper, a defamer. The media boss went on to say that “I would hang myself in Taksim square (if Çiller could back up her claims)”.²⁶ The dispute continued with a massive frontal attack on Çiller in Doğan controlled media that ended with an article in *Hürriyet* that concluded that Çiller was a liar.²⁷ However, the official report endorsed by the public prosecutor in Erzurum clearly indicates that the legal proceedings were initiated based on oral allegations by the *Milliyet* reporters, considered to be an accusation of criminal misconduct. According to Fehmi Kuru, the “action defined as a "criminal accusation" by the state prosecutor, is not accepted as a "defamatory accusation of a criminal act" by Doğan, who initially declared: "I will accept being the owner of a newspaper that is involved in tip-offs.”²⁸

Any way you slice it is clear that the media owner had the upper hand regarding the means to get his message through. Doğan was a friend of *Anavatan Partisi* (ANAP; Motherland Party) leader Mesut Yılmaz, Çiller’s centre-right rival. Many sources mention the bad blood between the two party leaders. According to Nicole and Hugh Pope (2004:313), Yılmaz had an “almost allergic dislike of Tansu Çiller”. Another interesting point is that Çiller was supported by another media conglomerate, the Akşam Group.²⁹ This group had fought a costly war with the Doğan Group a few years earlier.³⁰ The picture that emerges is a rather complex web of allegiances where personal ties between media owners and pro-business centre-right politicians for years determined the fault lines in Turkish politics. Fehmi Kuru paints a rather bleak portrait of the Turkish media landscape: “Our media would not hesitate a minute to use the truth to support its wrongs. It would be very difficult to find any other country in which what the media wants and what the people want are so incongruous with one another.”³¹ İlnur Çevik is also quite tired of this state of affairs: “It is sad to hear media barons claiming they have never tried to manipulate politicians when we all witnessed personally how they forced their journalists in Parliament to lobby for their business interests...”³²

²⁶ Kuru, Fehmi (1999): “*Media, lies and politicians*”.
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11993> (03.02.2006)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Çevik, İlnur (1996): “*Deep disappointment over the press wars*”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=1013> (04.02.2006)

³⁰ See paragraph 5.4 for an analysis of this fight.

³¹ Kuru, Fehmi (1999): “*Media, lies and politicians*”.
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11993> (03.02.2006)

³² Çevik, İlnur (1999): “*...and Çiller takes on the media baron*”.
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11928> (03.02.2006)

But it's not only the media owners who get their peace of somebody's mind. Çiller and ANAP leader Mesut Yılmaz are also criticised for letting the situation get out of hand by allowing the media conglomerates to grow unchecked, and even doing them favours. According to Çevik:

“All this show the ugly face of the state of affairs in Turkey, where politicians, media bosses, businessmen and state officials have been entangled in a rather complicated relationship that has fanned corruption and irregularities. (...) You feed the media barons, and then the monster you created tries to swallow you up. This is what Çiller is confronted with today. Both Çiller and Yılmaz have given businessmen and some media barons the golden opportunity to manipulate themselves, and this is where we have ended up.”³³

However, a few days later Çevik concluded with the following statement: “The actions of the prosecutors against political parties and the negative attitudes of some media barons all help the victims.”³⁴ Çevik argues that Çiller's political campaign had gained ground after she took on Doğan. The war of words between the two had according to Çevik hurt the media boss more than the party leader. “Dogan has created the image that he is too much involved in politics, and unfortunately, *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*, as well as his *Kanal D TV*, are being used for political campaign purposes...”³⁵ Çevik is here echoing Mustafa Sönmez' argument, presented in the preceding paragraph, that there seems to be limits to how much the media barons can influence people's choices, and that they suffer from an acute lack of credibility.

The critical attitude against Doğan in Turkish Daily News also deserves attention. Less than a year after these stories were printed, Doğan bought the newspaper. I am not suggesting that he did this to silence opponents. But it is interesting to note that he has received far less critical coverage after he became owner of the leading English daily in Turkey. Then editor İlnur Çevik apparently felt the need to explain the papers policies to its readers after the sale:

“...at the time of the merger we were accused of compromising on the liberal policies of the paper by joining a group that some people claimed was conservative and would not allow the paper to continue on its reformist, constructive and innovative course. Time has proven them wrong. The Turkish Daily News continues to be run by the Çevik family with massive moral

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Çevik, İlnur (1999): “Harassment of parties helping their popularity...”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11942> (03.02.2006)

³⁵ Ibid.

support from the Doğan family. On the contrary, the liberal and democratic policies of the Turkish Daily News have been encouraged by Aydın Doğan... ”³⁶

5.1.1.2. Tantan vs Doğan

There have been many accusations voiced against Aydın Doğan, and most are hard to substantiate. That may be because he has been careful to avoid direct involvement in politics or in irregularities, or that he has been a master in clearing his tracks. It may also be that the people who make the allegations have dishonest motives of some kind. But there are a couple of cases that are more trustworthy than others. The war of words between Doğan and Tansu Çiller is well documented. Another case is Doğan’s role in the downfall of Sadettin Tantan.

Tantan was interior minister in Bülent Ecevit’s coalition government from 1999 until he was replaced in June 2001. The former police chief led an anti-corruption campaign that exposed irregularities in the Ministry of Energy and in the state pipeline corporation, *BOTAŞ*. The campaign also reached high into the bureaucracy and administrations of failed banks, and it looked as though a major corruption scandal engulfing even the deputy prime minister Mesut Yılmaz, an acquaintance of Aydın Doğan, was about to unfold. But it was allegations aired by Tantan on a talk show on CNN Türk in March 2001 that led to a direct confrontation between the minister and the media tycoon. On the talk show *32. Gün* (The 32nd Day), hosted by the prominent reporter and author Mehmet Ali Birand, Tantan said that the Doğan owned *Dışbank* was one of the banks that were under investigation for irregularities.³⁷ After the allegations were made CNN Türk, which is a joint venture between Doğan and Time Warner, managed to reach their boss by telephone, and a quarrel erupted on air between Tantan and Doğan. Many people were astonished by the direct accusations against *Dışbank*, a venture that had been earning substantial profits. Although Tantan was hugely popular among most ordinary Turks for his anti-corruption campaign, many voices raised sympathy for Doğan.³⁸ At a time when many private Turkish banks were struggling with enormous debt, and many were taken over by the *TMSF*, *Dışbank* managed to stay floating. In June Tantan was demoted from interior minister to state minister responsible for customs. His response was to resign immediately, both from the government and the *ANAP*. “No matter how popular a figure he

³⁶ Çevik, İlnur (2004): ” 43 years with your newspaper”

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=35689> (07.02.2006)

³⁷ Yeni Şafak (2001): ”*Bakan Tantan ne demek istedi?*” (“What did minister Tantan mean?”).

<http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/arsiv/2001/mart/03/gundem.html> (03.02.2006)

³⁸ Bumin, Kürşad (2001): “*Bu sefer "patron" haklı...*” (“This time the business owner is in the right...”).

<http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/arsiv/2001/mart/05/kbumin.html> (03.02.2006)

became in the public eye, his treading on the toes of certain circles running the country led to his demise”, concluded Mehmet Ali Birand.³⁹ The official story was that Tantan was forced from office because of feuding with the party leadership, including party leader Mesut Yılmaz. But many people suspect that leading businessmen, including Doğan, helped Yılmaz to clear the ground for Tantan’s fall.⁴⁰ The coverage of the interior minister in many Doğan controlled outlets after Tantan’s allegations against *Dışbank* was certainly not favourable.

5.1.1.3. Ilıcak vs Doğan

“*Ilıcak is a very modern lady who drinks wine and has nothing to do with fundamentalism. Yet, she is now labelled as the champion of the fundamentalists.*”⁴¹

The banning of parliamentarian Nazlı Ilıcak of the moderate Islamist *Fazilet Partisi* (*FP*; Virtue Party) from politics came as a shock to many Turks.⁴² The outspoken reporter turned politician was one of the main opposition voices in parliament, and by most commentators she was seen as a reformist within the Islamist political grouping. Ilıcak’s political career ended when The Constitutional Court in June 2001 decided to ban *FP* on charges that it was a “hub of fundamentalist activity”.⁴³ But the only two parliamentarians who lost their seat, Ilıcak and Bekir Sobacı, were regarded as moderate reformers within the Islamist political movement.⁴⁴ This suggests that there were other motives behind the barring of the two from political life for five years. İlnur Çevik argues that both had angered too many powerful people by voicing criticism against elements in the business elite and the military.⁴⁵ It is known that Ilıcak “wanted to probe claims that Aydın Doğan was exploiting his muscle to bully governments into extending him commercial favours”.⁴⁶ It is also a fact that a number of Doğan owned media outlets wrote extensively about the charges that Ilıcak was promoting anti-secularism. This is linked to her support of *FP* deputy Merve Kavakçı who entered the parliament chamber wearing a head scarf in 1999. Kavakçı was forced out of parliament and

³⁹ Birand, Mehmet Ali (2001): “*What did Tantan pay the price for?*”

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=23648> (03.02.2006)

⁴⁰ The Economist (2002): *Face Value: A Turkish Rupert Murdoch*. 362 (8260). 70.

⁴¹ Çevik, İlnur (2001): “*What a verdict*” <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=23871> (03.02.2006)

⁴² *Fazilet Partisi* was the successor to *Refah Partisi*, which was banned in 1998.

⁴³ Çevik, İlnur (2001): “*What a verdict*” <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=23871> (03.02.2006)

⁴⁴ The rest of the *FP* parliamentarians remained in their seats as independents.

⁴⁵ Çevik, İlnur (2001): “*What a verdict*” <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=23871> (03.02.2006)

⁴⁶ The Economist (2002): *Face Value: A Turkish Rupert Murdoch*. 362 (8260). 70.

her citizenship withdrawn,⁴⁷ allegedly because she had acquired US nationality without the prior agreement of the Turkish authorities. Ilıcak's support of Kavakçı, and her allegations about the ties between media bosses and politicians, earned her some very powerful enemies.

Ilıcak had also gone straight at the throat of the powerful military. In her column in the daily *Yeni Şafak* she claimed that the General Staff in 1998 instigated a smear campaign against certain prominent journalists, intellectuals and political parties to discredit them.⁴⁸ Ilıcak later at a press conference claimed that a memorandum called "A Powerful Plan of Action", published as a facsimile in her column, had been prepared by leading generals after they had captured the deputy leader of the outlawed *PKK*, Semdin Sakik. In an alleged testimony of the *PKK*-leader many prominent people were named as *PKK*-collaborators, and these names were leaked to the press. The first victim of the smear campaign was Akın Birdal, then chairman of the *İnsan Hakları Derneği (İHD; Human Rights Association)*. Shortly after he had been accused of aiding the *PKK* Birdal was gunned down on 12 May 1998 by two attackers.⁴⁹ Only immediate attention of a doctor on the *İHD* staff saved his life.⁵⁰ In the aftermath of the shooting then prime minister Mesut Yılmaz was quoted as saying: "It is understood that it was an internal settling of accounts. Like a misunderstanding between those in the same camp... It is clear they (the *İHD*) were connected to the *PKK*."⁵¹ If Yılmaz knew of the alleged smear campaign when he made the statement, remains unknown. Inquiries shortly afterwards led investigators to a nationalist group. 16 alleged members or supporters of this group, including a retired army major, a serving gendarmerie officer and the two men thought to have carried out the shooting, were arrested. The group is widely believed to have had links with the *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı (MİT; National Intelligence Organisation)* in the past.⁵²

Journalists and authors Mehmet Ali Birand, Cengiz Çandar, Mahir Kavnak, Yalçın Küçük and Mahir Savin were also singled out in the press leaks as collaborators with the *PKK*. All of

⁴⁷ Turkish Daily News (2001): "*Ilıcak: I will not be silenced*" <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=23893> (03.02.2006)

⁴⁸ Turkish Daily News (2000): "*FP Deputy Ilıcak accuses TSK of smear campaign*" <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=20324> (04.02.2006)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Amnesty International (1999): "*Creating a silent society: Turkish Government prepares to imprison leading human rights defender*" <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR440051999?open&of=ENG-2U5> (04.02.2006)

⁵¹ Çevik, İlnur (1998): "*So Birdal was not shot by PKK terrorists*" <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=7241> (04.02.2006)

⁵² Turkish Daily News (1998): "*Yılmaz: Yesil behind Birdal attack*" <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=7330> (04.02.2006)

them suffered as a consequence of the extensive media coverage. Birand and Çandar were forced to suspend their columns in the daily *Sabah*, and because of the so-called “gentleman’s agreement” between the newspaper barons at the time not to employ people who resign or are fired from each other’s publications, they were left out in the cold.⁵³ The pro-Kurdish political party *Demokratik Halk Partisi (DEHAP; Democratic People’s Party)* and Ilıcak’s own *FP* were also singled out in the press leaks as collaborators with the *PKK*. The General Staff in the end reluctantly admitted that a memorandum had been written, but stated that it was only a memorandum, and that it was not acted upon.⁵⁴ Both the shooting of Birdal and the banning of *Fazilet Partisi* and the two parliamentarians Ilıcak and Sobacı caused an uproar in Europe. Ilıcak made sure that it wasn’t forgotten by appealing her political ban to the European Court of Human Rights.⁵⁵ Other former deputies from the *FP*, including Kavakçı, did the same. The case started in October 2005. At the time of writing judgment had not been delivered.

5.1.1.4. Doğan’s agenda

So how do we assess the role of Aydın Doğan in Turkish politics? Does he have a clear political agenda? Is he just defending his economic interests? I argue that an analysis of his influence must follow lines of inquiry both into the economic and the political sphere. Doğan as an individual must also to some degree be separated from his many media outlets, as it is impossible for him to control all the day to day decisions made by his editors. In some cases, like the allocation of government tenders, the economic and political spheres are connected. It is a fact that he has gained material wealth in the form of government contracts and subsidies from his ties with politicians. It is also a fact that he repeatedly has confronted politicians, and that his media outlets have tended to be critical of the politicians he has had an argument with. Doğan owned media outlets also rarely criticise their owner or other Doğan companies. But it is also a fact that his media outlets on many issues carry a lively debate. The Doğan owned daily *Radikal* is one of few newspapers that systematically exposes human-rights abuses by the security forces and the police and corruption among politicians. It is also a fact that heavy weight trans nationals like Time Warner is so pleased with his professionalism that they dear venture into joint operations like CNN Türk. Doğan himself also fiercely denies all claims levelled on him that he interferes with his editors decisions. “I am sometimes outraged by the

⁵³ Çevik, İlnur (1998): “*Semdin sings, two prominent journalists face suspension*”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=6928> (04.02.2006)

⁵⁴ Boulton, Ralph (2001): “*Former MP Nazlı Ilıcak heads for political shadow world*” (Reuters)
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=24041> (04.02.2006)

⁵⁵ Turkish Daily News (2002): “*Ilıcak appeals to European Court on her political ban*”
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=27649> (04.03.2006)

stories my papers print”, he is reported saying.⁵⁶ According to Fehmi Kuru, it is more a matter of an unprofessional journalistic mentality and an urge to participate in leading the country on the right path, a path that is seen as leading westwards. Kuru relates the case of the fabricated story of Washington Post journalist Janet Cook, which brought her a Pulitzer,⁵⁷ to Doğan’s tv-appearance on *NTV* defending his newspaper *Milliyet* against allegations from Tansu Çiller.

*“Despite being a journalist by trade, no one heard Katherine Graham, the owner of the Post, getting defensive and making comments such as, “I will declare my newspaper a defamer,” simply because it is not the duty of newspaper owners to defend the news and the commentaries published in their newspapers.”*⁵⁸

Koru’s arguments are interesting because they tell us something about the way Doğan relates to his media belongings and his editors. It would have been more natural for *Milliyet*’s editor to defend the accusations against the newspaper. The following campaign against Çiller in Doğan controlled news outlets also tells us something of the bonds between these media institutions, and the convergence of interest and ideological outlook between them. Doğan controls the appointment of editors and their salaries. In addition many prominent editors have been members of the board in *Doğan Yayın Holding*, which owns the media related enterprises, and in the mother company, Doğan Holding. All this means that Doğan does not need to exercise control over his editors on a daily basis, something that would have been practically impossible anyway. They know where he stands, and he knows where they stand.

Koru’s second argument, that Doğan has a political mission, is harder to substantiate. In the following I will shed light on this argument by analysing what I have called the “taboos” in Turkish public debate. “Agenda control” is a related term describing the same phenomenon.

5.2. Agenda control

The fact that media owners and media outlets are directly involved in politics is not a new phenomenon. Many European newspapers were initially launched by a political group of some kind. Although most of these papers now are independent, I argue that such political

⁵⁶ The Economist (2002): *Face Value: A Turkish Rupert Murdoch*. 362 (8260). 70.

⁵⁷ Janet Cook won a Pulitzer in 1982 for the article “*Jimmy’s World*” that was printed in the Washington Post 29 September 1981. The story, a gripping tale about an eight-year-old heroin addict, turned out to be fraudulent.

⁵⁸ Kuru, Fehmi (1999): “*Media, lies and politicians*”.

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11993> (03.02.2006).

involvement is not questionable if it is out in the open, and there is a vibrant and diverse press. In a situation where the news media are owned by a handful of big industrial conglomerates with major vested interests in a certain political ideology and development, and the media products are aggressively promoted as neutral and objective, it certainly becomes worrying. That is probably why people like Cem Uzan and Aydın Doğan vehemently deny any claim that they influence the content of their outlets in a way that promote a certain worldview. They know that they must nourish their image as deliverers of objective and neutral reporting to keep their part of the social contract. But one must bear in mind that businessmen and investors will support the system that feeds them, namely the capitalist mode of production and the – at least on paper – free market. That is why I argue that it is imperative that we have transparent and efficient forces in place to moderate and regulate the effects of private ownership, such as regulatory agencies answerable to a pluralistic political system, limits on media concentration and editorial agreements to name a few. Such forces are especially important in cases where the political agenda of the people who control the content of the media are disguised behind a veil of objectivity and neutrality.

To illustrate this point I will analyse certain taboos in the public debate in Turkey. I will show that the themes that are regarded as taboos have changed during the last few decades, and that the power to define what constitutes a taboo to some extent has been privatised. The first part consists of a discussion of what I have called “old taboos”. These have been studied quite extensively, and the discussion has been linked to the ongoing scrutiny of the Turkish commitment to international human rights standards. The second part consists of a discussion of what I have called “new taboos”, which I define as criticism of the prevailing pro-capitalist and pro-market discourse. Although some media scholars, politicians and NGOs have started to take these issues more seriously, there exists no authoritative account of them, and they have not been linked to the fashionable discourse on Human Rights.

5.2.1. Old taboos

“Everybody thinks we are so democratic now. We can talk and write about anything. Yeah Right. Everybody knows his or her limits. There are so many topics off-limits. There are delicate issues, not taboos maybe, taboo is a big word. But every smart reporter and journalist knows his or her limits. At what point he can loose the job, or can be sent to jail. So everybody knows. But these are invisible obstacles, invisible limits. If you can play by the rules, be part of the system, you’ll be fine. But other than that, tough. Everything is

mainstream. Everything is moderate. Everything is supporting the status quo. It's not diverse. Nobody is challenging the limits."⁵⁹

Turkish citizens enjoyed fairly high levels of political rights and civil liberties in the second half of the 1970s. According to Freedom House, Turkey was considered a free society.⁶⁰ After the 1980 coup the country slid down the rank, and has since been labelled "partial free" by the same organisation. There have been ups and downs during this period, with the late 1980s marking a slow movement in the right direction. During the mid 1990s, when the open conflict between the Turkish Armed Forces and the Kurdish *PKK* was at its peak, the situation deteriorated again.⁶¹ The amount of political rights and civil liberties has despite recent reforms still not reached the levels of the late 1970s. The findings of Freedom House are supported by other international organisations; among them Human Rights Watch (1999:1):

"The press in Turkey—in the vernacular of psychiatry—suffers from multiple personality disorder. When reporting on the vast majority of issues, such as domestic party politics or the economy, the media today is lively and unrestricted—indeed often sensational. (...) Alongside the arena of free discussion there is a danger zone where many who criticise accepted state policy face possible state persecution. Risky areas include the role of Islam in politics and society, Turkey's ethnic Kurdish minority and the conflict in south-eastern Turkey, the nature of the state, and the proper role of the military."

This pretty much sums up what I have chosen to call the "old taboos" in Turkey. They have existed since the birth of the Turkish Republic in 1923, and are in many ways a by-product of the nationalist and secular policies and reforms introduced by the Atatürk regime. The politically, ethnically and religiously motivated upheavals of the last 30 years, combined with increasing international and domestic focus on human rights and civil liberties, have made them an increasingly contested area. Although many of the "old taboos" arguably are less sensitive today, there are still cases that might seem shocking to a Western observer. The

⁵⁹ Aslı Tunç, interview with author, Kadıköy, Istanbul 18 July 2005.

⁶⁰ For a survey of annual country scores, see: Freedom House (2003): *Annual Freedom in the World Country Scores, 1972 through 2003*. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/allscore04.xls> (9.11.2005)

⁶¹ The definition of this conflict has been the subject of controversy. Terms like "civil war", "armed conflict" and "war" have been used. The Turkish Government claims that since both the US and the EU have declared the *PKK* as a terrorist organisation, the struggle should not be portrayed as an armed conflict, but as a "fight against terrorism". This is highly debatable, but I have anyway chosen to use the neutral term "open conflict".

most profiled example recently is the case brought against Turkey's most famous living author, Orhan Pamuk, by a public prosecutor in Istanbul last August.⁶²

It started when Pamuk during a discussion on the curbs on freedom of expression in Turkey told the Swiss newspaper *Tages Anzeiger* (Daily Reviewer) in February that "a million Armenians and 30,000 Kurds were killed in this country and I'm the only one who dares to talk about it".⁶³ These are highly sensitive issues in Turkey, and the day after the interview appeared parts of the Turkish press launched a fierce attack on Pamuk, branding him a traitor. Following several death threats, the author went into hiding abroad. The case against Pamuk, which caused condemnations from organisations and politicians from around the world, was originally set to start 16 December 2005. If found guilty of "publicly denigrating" Turkish identity, the author would face up to three years in prison.⁶⁴ The Turkish foreign minister Abdullah Gül did however in a thinly disguised criticism of the overzealous prosecutor say that Pamuk must and will win the case.⁶⁵ The legal action and threats against Pamuk is surely not helping the image of Turkey at a time when discussions in European countries on Turkey's future relationship with the EU are heated. The foreign minister and a number of Turkish reporters and intellectuals know that a high profiled case like this only amplifies the authoritarian and illiberal image of Turkey.⁶⁶ At the time of writing it looks like Pamuk is left off the hook. In January 2006 the court announced that it would drop the case against the novelist, but the damage to Turkey's image had already been done.⁶⁷

There is another point to be made about these old taboos, namely the capricious arbitrariness that has characterised the enforcement of the restrictive press laws. This makes it virtually impossible for people to know when they will get into trouble and for what. An interesting case that illustrates this is the interview that the reporter and columnist Oral Çalışlar did with

⁶² Orhan Pamuk (b. 1952) is the author of internationally acclaimed novels such as *Kar* (Snow), *Beyaz Kale* (The White Castle) and *Benim Adım Kırmızı* (My name is Red). His name has more than once been mentioned among the candidates to the Nobel Prize in literature. See: Smith, Alex Duval (2005): "Nobel split delays book prize". <http://books.guardian.co.uk/news/articles/0,6109,1588207,00.html> (17.11.2005)

⁶³ Freely, Maureen (2005): "I stand by my words. And even more, I stand by my right to say them..." <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,6903,1598633,00.html> (16.11.2005) (Maureen Freely is a personal friend of Pamuk, and has translated his novels "Snow" and "Istanbul: Memories of a city" to English.)

⁶⁴ BBC News (2005): "Turk 'genocide' author faces jail". <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4205708.stm> (16.11.2005)

⁶⁵ Zaman (2005): "Gül: Pamuk, hakkında açılan davayı kazanacak" (Gül: Pamuk will win the case filed against him). <http://www.zaman.com.tr/?bl=dishaberler&alt=&trh=20051010&hn=218410> (17.11.2005)

⁶⁶ Gültaşlı, Selçuk (2005): "Önyargılara pas atmak" (Feeding Prejudices). <http://www.zaman.com.tr/?bl=yazarlar&trh=20051107&hn=220625> (19.11.2005)

⁶⁷ BBC News (2006): "Court drops Turkish writer's case". <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4637886.stm> (01.02.2006)

the leader of *PKK*, Abdullah Öcalan, and the head of the *Partiya Sosyalist a Kurdistan (PSK;* Socialist Party of Kurdistan), Kemal Burkay, in early 1993.⁶⁸ The interview ran for 18 days as a series of full-page articles in *Cumhuriyet*, but no prosecution followed. When the series of interviews was published as a book some months later, the State Security Court in Istanbul banned the publication under Article 28 of the constitution, deeming it to be “separatist propaganda” (Human Rights Watch 1999:57-58). Shortly thereafter the author and the book’s publisher, Muzaffer Erdoğan, were charged. In October 1994 both men were found guilty. Çalışlar was given a two-year sentence, while Erdoğan was given six months. If we view this in light of the ongoing open conflict in Turkey at the time, we see that the interview series in *Cumhuriyet* appeared during a cease-fire that held for nearly two months. When the book appeared in September the same year a major escalation of the conflict was on its way.

The social status of the so-called violator also seems to be of importance. “Newspaper columnists in the mainstream press – many of whom enjoy near superstar status – have the most freedom to write as they please” (Ibid:54-55). Reporters and columnists writing for the Kurdish nationalist newspapers and for left-wing publications find themselves in trouble with the authorities more often. This has a lot to do with the fact that these publications represent the minority views in Turkey, and as such this phenomenon can also be explained by an analysis of what I have called the “new taboos” in Turkey.

5.2.2. New taboos

The media in Turkey experienced a relatively liberal environment in the early 1950s, and then again in the 1960s. But it is still fair to say that the concept and workings of a free media was not deeply ingrained in Turkish culture when the army withdrew to its barracks in 1983. Under Turgut Özal – and consequent governments in the 1990s – Turkey experienced a situation where the environment for investment and trade was liberalised, almost without any mechanism to curb, control or balance the growth of government friendly business empires, while the environment for political discussion was severely restricted. The businessmen who benefited from this state of affairs, among them most of the owners of the conglomerates discussed in this thesis, had no interest in letting their media outlets criticise a development that benefited companies in their portfolio, and that could get them into trouble with the authorities. This created a development where the privatisation of public businesses and assets

⁶⁸ For more cases, see Human Rights Watch 1999:51-60.

and the liberalisation of the foreign trade regime went along almost without any public dissent or criticism. If you on top of this add the aforementioned restrictions on discussion of the “old taboos”, we are looking at an environment where debate and discussion are restricted on nearly all sides. It is of course harder to measure the extent and impact of these “new taboos”, since they are not subject to legal restrictions. It is safe to say that we lack adequate parameters to analyse them. I argue that the most effective avenue of inquiry is to investigate the media outlets’ relationship with big capital, and the big league businessmen’s relationship with each other and with political authorities. Self-censorship is the word most often applied to describe avoidance of certain topics on grounds of common interests among societal elites. I argue that there is a regime of self-censorship in place in the conglomerate owned media today that is a hindrance to critique of the laissez-faire capitalist system that has allowed almost unchecked growth of media conglomerates. This is also the line of inquiry Mustafa Sönmez has followed in his studies of Turkish media.

“Before the 1980s many views could be expressed. But for the time being it’s not easy to find a place if you for example are against privatisation, or liberal politics in general. You cannot find a place in a newspaper or on a TV channel, because the owners see to it that his newspapers or TV stations support privatisation.”⁶⁹

This not only benefits the media barons, but also other big business players and the various governments since 1983: in other words all the groups that have had an interest in the extensive privatisation programmes. These programmes and the way they have been handled have been and still are controversial among many intellectuals in Turkey. Sönmez is certain that it would have been controversial among a much larger segment of the population if there had been more discussion about it in the mainstream media and more critical reporting on the many shady deals that have been conducted between big league businessmen and top politicians. Sönmez paints a picture of a highly integrated big business sector in Turkey, where financial and organic links like intermarriage and common representation in the prominent NGO *Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği (Tüsiad; Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association)* govern the relationships rather than competition.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

⁷⁰ *Tüsiad* was founded by 12 prominent Turkish businessmen in 1971. It represents the big business interests.

“It’s almost collective ownership because the others, although they are not physically owners, give their support through advertisement etc. They all believe that the liberal economy is the right one, globalisation is the right way and making agreements with the IMF is the right preference. They have a consensus about these macro principles. This is in politics too, not only in economics. They are secular, and they have a pro-EU view.”

Editor-in-chief Mehmet T. Sucu of *Cumhuriyet* also claims that the mainstream media in Turkey are pro-capitalist, and that only a handful of small outlets question the workings of market liberalism and big capital. He paints a picture of a polarised media environment.

*“There are two types of newspapers in Turkey: Opinion newspapers and mainstream like *Hürriyet* and *Sabah*. Opinion newspapers constitute approximately 10 per cent of the market. *Cumhuriyet*, *Özgür Gündem* (Free Agenda) and maybe *Vakit* (Time). Sometimes the mainstream papers also make investigative journalism. They also try to change people’s minds. They try to bring them to the capitalist side.”⁷¹*

Dilruba Çatalbaş claims that it is the commercial logic of the mainstream media outlets that seemingly by default narrows the scope of pluralism. She argues that a system where the main criteria for choice of programming are ratings, day-to-day sales and the preferences of advertisers, cannot produce enough space for controversial opinions.

“You don’t have to exert daily direct influence as an owner to keep these people out of your paper or channel. The nature of your operation itself is guarantee enough for these people to be left outside. What you have is a commercial operation, and everybody there knows that. You have people hired to make sure that things are done in a commercially viable way as possible.”⁷²

The picture that emerges if we sum up these arguments is that there has been a convergence of interests between the political and the economic elites in Turkey since the early 1980s. When somebody tries to upset this balance, like Erbakan did in 1996 and Tantan and Ilıcak did in 2001, they are bound to get into trouble. But many Turks, including commentators quoted in this chapter, are indeed tired of this state of affairs. But in a sense they are powerless. The

⁷¹ Mehmet T. Sucu, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

⁷² Dilruba Çatalbaş, interview with author, Istanbul 14 July 2005.

unchecked growth of a handful of government-friendly conglomerates has created an environment where a small portion of the business interests in the country now controls a very large slice of the Turkish economy. But as long as much of their wealth stems from lucrative personal ties with government officials, and the economic policies of the government continue to safeguard their economic welfare, it is not in the interest of these businessmen to confront or challenge these policies, although the policies clearly have created increasing social gaps in the country. Consequently the mainstream media in Turkey does not function as a check on neither public nor private power abuse. This argument is to some extent simplified. The convergence seems to be stronger in the overall political outlook than in the actual shaping and practical appliance of the economic policies. It is quite usual to see critical comments in the mainstream media on how the government applies free market principles, but it is quite unusual to see criticism of the free market ideology in general in these outlets. The biggest paradox is perhaps that both the powerful players and the people who try to fight them are eager to join the EU. The business elite sees lucrative European markets opening up, while their critics welcome the implementation of rules and regulations that can end corruption and work as a check on the powerful businessmen.

5.3. Fighting each other

Arguments between media outlets are a common feature in many countries. It is a natural part of any dynamic and free society, and it bears witness of healthy competition. But when arguments are fought with sword rather than pen, it ceases to be part of a healthy public dialogue. It gets even worse if the relative strength of the combatants is clearly uneven, and rules to regulate the game are either lacking or easy to circumvent. Many unscrupulous battles have been fought between media outlets, media conglomerates and media owners in Turkey. Here I will elaborate on one of them.⁷³

In 1996 paperboys could be seen and heard in the streets of big Turkish cities selling copies of the daily *Akşam*. After the advent of home delivery and news kiosks this had been an uncommon sight in Turkey, being an expensive and ineffective way of distribution. Although many viewed the phenomenon as slightly romantic, the publishers of *Akşam* did not. They had fallen foul of the biggest players in the newspaper game, the Bilgin Group and the Doğan Group. These two groups had a virtual monopoly of the distribution of mainstream media in

⁷³ For a detailed analysis of another major media battle, see Sönmez 2004.

Turkey through their joint company *Bir-Yay*, and they decided to increase the distribution fees for the Akşam Group's papers by 90 per cent, thus in practice annulling the distribution contract. The reason for doing so was allegedly that they wanted to protect readers from "unscrupulous promotion campaigns".⁷⁴ *Akşam* in turn claimed that the refusal was not aimed at protecting readers, but the market share of the newspapers of Bilgin and Doğan. The publisher of *Akşam*, Mehmet Ali Ilıcak,⁷⁵ had formed an alliance with the Uzan Group to challenge Bilgin's and Doğan's hold on the newspaper market. Large investments had been made in printing presses and other equipment, and plans were floated to distribute journals across 13 provinces. This was a clear challenge to the big players. But instead of facing this challenge by fair means, they decided to settle their differences and merge their distribution networks to combat their junior rivals. It is also reported that Bilgin and Doğan threatened journalists who joined an Akşam Group paper that they would never work for either of the other groups' papers again.⁷⁶ It is a fact that *Akşam* established itself on the Turkish media market by an aggressive promotion campaign consisting of coupons in the paper with which the buyer could win everything from computers to Italian furniture. It is also a fact that Ilıcak later was charged with irregularities in these promotion campaigns, and had to serve a short stint in Bayrampaşa prison in Istanbul. Such promotion campaigns were conducted by most mainstream newspapers at the time.

What was called the "latest battle in the press wars" drew widespread condemnation.⁷⁷ The chairman of the Turkish Press Council, Oktay Eksi, said that the monopolisation of media distribution is a development as dangerous as the monopolisation of the media itself, while the *Türkiye Gazeteciler Cemiyeti* (TGC; Turkish Journalists Association) stated that "unfair competition and competition without rules would eventually harm the whole press as an institution".⁷⁸ Demands for antitrust laws were raised, but the government remained passive.⁷⁹ Mehmet Ali Ilıcak was bound to lose to his much more powerful rivals in the long run, and in the end he sold *Akşam*. The media owners' use of their outlets to tarnish the reputation of competitors runs like a thread through all the battles in the various "press wars" in Turkey.

⁷⁴ Yoruk, Zafer (1996): "*Paper War: Read All About It*"
http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/oldeditions.php?dir=09_20_96&d=probe&fn=politics.htm

⁷⁵ Mehmet Ali Ilıcak is son of famous columnist and former parliamentarian Nazlı Ilıcak (see paragraph 5.2.3.).

⁷⁶ Yoruk, Zafer (1996): "*Paper War: Read All About It*"
http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/oldeditions.php?dir=09_20_96&d=probe&fn=politics.htm

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Çevik, İlnur (1996): "*Plight of Akşam, new phase in press wars*"
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=1014> (04.02.2006)

5.4. Fighting together

The “press wars” have regularly been interrupted by cease-fires. This usually happens when the media faces a common enemy, as witnessed in the secular outlets’ campaign against the moderate Islamist *RP* government in 1996 and 1997, and the lobbying to amend the Broadcasting Law after the Supreme Court descended on the widespread illegal practice of allowing the major media owners to participate in government tenders. To understand why this caused the media tycoons to settle their differences for a short while, a brief overview of the Turkish broadcasting legislation is necessary.

When Cem Uzan and Ahmet Özal set up the first Turkish private television channel in 1990, the state monopoly on radio and television transmissions came to an abrupt end. There was no legislation to regulate the new electronic media landscape, and the private Turkish broadcasting market thus developed in a legal limbo until a new broadcasting law was passed on 13 April 1994. The new law established the *RTÜK*, with extensive powers to assert a tight control over the broadcasting market. The Broadcasting Law was a heavy-handed reaction to the previous anarchy. When the state’s broadcasting monopoly was falling apart with the advent of *Star* and other private channels that followed suit, the focus of public concern with the respect to ownership of the new private broadcasters “was not concentration, but rather the abuse of media power” (Open Society Institute 2005:1573). The law introduced the imposition of a 20 per cent ceiling on all aspects of ownership in broadcasting. In addition, shareholders’ next of kin were forbidden to own any shares in the same enterprise, and foreign investors were only allowed to invest in one broadcasting enterprise. Finally, any one with more than 10 per cent of the shares in a broadcasting enterprise was barred from government tenders or businesses. But the law did not prevent media outlets from serving their owner’s interests as intended. “In practice, it turned out that the law actually encouraged a veiled structure that was wide open to abuse” (Open Society Institute 2005:1573-1574). Although ownership structures on paper for the most part were in conformity with the law, all the major broadcasters were part of a media group, and some had several television and radio channels. Everyone also knew that almost every channel had one boss. In the ownership forms submitted to the *RTÜK*, the list of shareholders could contain the “names of a driver or doorman, or a company lawyer” (Open Society Institute 2005:1575). Corporate structures were made confusingly complicated in order to distance broadcasting interests from newspaper interests, although all were in most cases literally under the same roof.

As shown in this chapter the concerns about abuse of media power turned out to be amply justified. Even more disturbing was the fact that the government of Mesut Yılmaz turned a blind eye, allowing media owners to participate in state tenders. “In fact, except for a few of the largest conglomerates, all those who could bid had media interests, as this was a necessity of the times for entrepreneurs who wanted a “slice of the pie in the privatizations and other tenders” (Ibid). The law thus “encouraged the very tendencies that it set out to prevent” (Ibid).

When the Supreme Court in 1999 suspended a lucrative energy contract a Doğan owned company had been awarded, pointing to the restrictions on cross-ownership set down in the Broadcasting Law, it led İlnur Çevik to applaud the decision by claiming that “the supreme court has proven there are clean judges in Turkey who uphold the laws rather than the interests of a handful of press barons”.⁸⁰ But his happiness was short-lived. The media bosses immediately and in concert started lobbying for amendments to the law, and their media outlets for the most part followed suit. The amendment proposals met with stiff popular opposition, and were even vetoed by President Ahmed Necdet Sezer. But on 15 May 2002 the parliament approved the amendments for a second time, making it impossible for the president to veto them again. Sezer, arguing that the new law gave the *RTÜK* powers that he deemed harmful to the freedom of the press and the media bosses a chance to monopolise the sector even further, forwarded the law to the Constitutional Court. On 12 June 2002, this court ruled for the annulment of five provisions and some paragraphs of the law, but the rest was left standing (Çatalbaş 2005:12). The Economist in a portrait of Aydın Doğan concludes that: “It is a measure of his influence that Turkey’s parliament approved the new media law...”⁸¹

The amended Broadcasting Law sets no limits on ownership. Instead, it employs a somewhat complicated annual average audience ratio threshold. This threshold is set at 20 per cent, which is currently above what any channel achieves. If a radio or television channel exceeds this threshold, the *RTÜK* requests the majority owner – whether an individual or a group – to reduce its share of ownership to below 50 per cent. If the audience threshold has been exceeded due to the ownership of shares in more than one radio and television channel, again, an appropriate number of shares, sufficient to reduce the total ownership share to below 50

⁸⁰ Çevik, İlnur (1999): “...and the press barons had to bow to justice” <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/archives.php?id=11762> (04.02.2006)

⁸¹ The Economist (2002): *Face Value: A Turkish Rupert Murdoch*. 362 (8260). 70.

per cent, needs to be sold. In the case of a breach, *RTÜK* can revoke the broadcaster's license. Two crucial sub-paragraphs setting the audience threshold were among the provisions and paragraphs that were annulled by the Constitutional Court. The result is that the Turkish media is yet again operating in a legal limbo. Some technical issues regarding the measuring of the audience threshold are not settled either. The *RTÜK* is thus left virtually powerless in regards to ownership issues, and this have enabled the Doğan Group to increase its share in the broadcasting market to 27 per cent by buying *Star TV*. It is also important to notice that the newspaper market is not affected by the restrictions in the Broadcasting Law. Mustafa Sönmez has now lost all faith in the parliament's efforts to control media ownership:

“Theoretically one person can own the whole market. But certain people do not want that to happen. It seems to me as if the Ciner group is unofficially supported by the military or some other powerful group just to have a balance. So, there is no official limit, but unofficially such a balance is preferred”, he claims.⁸²

5.5. Concluding remarks

Cem Uzan set a new standard of propaganda engineering in Turkey when he exploited his media outlets ruthlessly to promote his own political party. Uzan's intentions were so obvious that few failed to see his objective, and nobody has so far tried to outdo him. The case of Aydın Doğan is less conspicuous, and therefore arguably more worrying. Politicians who have criticised and challenged his position have seen their careers cut short, while others who have befriended him has received favourable coverage and in turn rewarded him with lucrative government contracts. Through his media outlets he has also been active in fighting legislation that threatens his position as Turkey's undisputable media baron, while he has promoted legal changes that could benefit him. This might be viewed as a healthy survival instinct of a successful businessman, and thus be rendered harmless. But when a pattern emerges that reveals that he frequently gets what he wants, although it is often clearly contrary to the public interest, it is far from harmless. Aydın Doğan is one of Turkey's richest men, he controls a major part of the Turkish media market as well as a range of other businesses, and he has a vested interest in a given political development. It is thus quite troubling when he is able to influence and even threaten democratically elected politicians to such an extent that he in sum emerges as a very powerful player on the political arena.

⁸² Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

Chapter VI: Restraints on Civil Society

You rarely see Mustafa Kemal Atatürk smile on photos, at least those taken of him before he became president in 1923. But his stern look does not convey anger or sadness, rather ambition, determination and self-confidence. It was an abundance of these qualities that made him a national rallying point that inspired the tired populace of war-torn Anatolia to stand up against the invading Greeks. It was these qualities Atatürk wanted to invest every Turk with after he had succeeded in saving the Turkish heartlands. One of his most famous sayings, “*ne mutlu Türküm diyene*” (“happy is the one who can call himself a Turk”), by many considered a national motto, is a perfect example of Atatürk's quest for Turkish self-confidence and pride – both for the country as a whole and for every individual.¹

Judging by the troubles his institution is facing, it would take a large dose of Atatürk's determination and confidence for president Ercan S. Ipekçi of the *Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası* (TGS; Union of Turkish Journalists) to keep his spirits up. Maybe that's why he keeps a mansized poster of a stern-looking Atatürk next to his office door. Ipekçi has in any case no intention to resign yet. And he needs all the determination and self-confidence he can muster to fight the powerful elite of the media establishment, many of whom as skeptical towards involvement from unions as Atatürk was in his authoritarian days. The following statement from Ertuğrul Özkök, editor-in-chief of *Hürriyet* and vice-chairman of the *Doğan Yayın Holding* executive committee, is a good indication of what he is up against: “*We hate article 212 and we do not like the union*” (International Federation of Journalists 2002:9).²

In this chapter I will outline and discuss the role of organised civil movements that are part of Turkey's media environment, with a focus on the trials and tribulations of trade unions and human rights organisations. The restraints imposed on various segments of civil society after the military coup in 1980 left these movements virtually without means to balance the growing influence of the new media owners. And without a third party to safeguard and promote the interests of media employees and the quality and content of media output offered to the public, the media owners have been left with a free hand to control most aspects of media production and distribution. As such the consequences of ownership concentration in Turkish media are arguably more serious and harmful – or at best have the potential to be so –

¹ For ethnic and religious minorities the explicit focus on Turkishness has had many negative effects.

² Article 212 refers to the Act on Labour-Management Relations in the Press.

in Turkey than in countries where a free and vibrant civil society is part of the overall societal power equation. My underlying perspective is thus to a certain degree comparative.

Civil society is a somewhat vague notion – a bag where it is tempting to place everything and everyone that doesn't fit other more clearly defined categories. But I believe that trade unions and human rights organisations operate well within the boundaries of what most scholars would define as civil society. Most would probably also agree that such organisations are among its most institutionalised and visible expressions. I am aware of the ongoing discussion of civil society in the Middle East that has followed in the wake of Edward W. Said's (1995) groundbreaking book "*Orientalism*". A wide body of work has been produced that challenges the somewhat euro centric notion of what constitutes civil society. Many scholars have argued that the growth of various moderate Islamist political and welfare networks³ and informal neighbourhood coalitions⁴ can be viewed as civil movements on equal terms with trade unions and other more traditionally defined civil groups. Some argue that the growth of such groups is an example of a strengthening of civil society in the Middle East.⁵ This is a major discussion that I do not have room to finish here. But I will stress that the political expressions of Islam in Turkey are not directly comparable with the situation in most other Middle Eastern countries, where Islamists are kept out of the political loop by force. A democratically elected moderate Islamist party presently governs Turkey, and there are many other Islamic-oriented groups, like the Fethullah Gülen Movement presented in paragraph 3.5.4, that arguably now are part of Turkish civil society on more or less equal terms with other civil movements, and as such are imposers of or subjects to the same restraints. Prime Minister Erdoğan's lawsuit against *Cumhuriyet*, discussed in paragraph 4.4.3, is evidence of this.

I must stress that the following analysis of the media trade unions may have limited validity concerning trade unions in other sectors in Turkish society, although their historical roots and development, as outlined in the following paragraph, are more or less the same.⁶ The violence and troubles facing Turkish human rights defenders, analysed in part two of this chapter, provides a more general insight into how powerful elements within the state organise

³ See White (2003) for an anthropological approach to Islamist groups in Turkey. Wickham's (2002) study of Islamic networks and political groups in Egypt is also valuable.

⁴ See Singerman (1995) for an excellent study of informal networks in Cairo. Bayat (1997) and Denoeux (1993) have also made thought-provoking contributions.

⁵ Göle (1994) argues for such an approach in relation to Turkey.

⁶ İlkey Sunar (2004) and Metin Heper (1994; 1994c) provide more general and comparative analyses and discussions of the formation and role of civil society in Turkey.

themselves in order to literally fight off perceived or real challenges from civil movements. The fate of these NGOs is not directly related to problems with ownership concentration in Turkish media. But there are three important factors that attribute importance to them in connection with my analysis: Firstly, one of the most important parameters prominent international human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch use when they measure the amount of political rights and civil liberties in a given society is how freely the media is allowed to operate. Secondly, there are no Chinese wall separating the human rights NGOs and the media. Brave reporters have risked their lives, and many have been killed, when they have investigated and uncovered human rights abuses, especially in the Southeast. These reporters have often worked together with members from human rights organisations. Thirdly, corporate media is in general quite supportive of the secular state and the army's protection of the exclusive Turkish character of the nation. Few mainstream outlets have showed any real interest in investigating human rights abuses committed by state agents against Kurds in the Southeast. This job has mostly been left to reporters from small independent outlets.

6.1. The rise and decline of trade unions

The first workers organisations comparable to trade unions appeared in Turkey in 1908. These were scattered organisations established mostly at state-owned enterprises, and they came into being during a short liberal interlude. After a big strike in 1909, all were banned. After World War I various professional organisations came into existence again, but after Atatürk promulgated the repressive *Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu* (Law on the Maintenance of Order) in 1925 the door to political organising, as well as unionising, was practically shut once again (Zürcher 2004:171). This repressive climate would continue throughout the single-party regime of the *CHP*, with an explicit ban on class-based organisation from 1938.

After the transition to a multi-party system in 1946, a relatively more liberal atmosphere led to the lifting of the ban on organisation following class-based differences. Soon afterwards numerous trade unions were established at the initiative of two new and short-lived socialist parties. To keep this movement under control, and to try to curb the growing popularity of the socialist political wing, the *CHP* organised the foundation of an umbrella organisation called the *Türkiye İşçiler Derneği* (Association of Workers of Turkey). However, the unions flourished very rapidly, and when their membership went up to thousands within a few months, the regime closed both the two socialist parties and the trade unions (Aslan & Baydar). But the events had demonstrated the inevitability of the establishment of trade

unions. Accordingly, the *CHP* government prepared a trade union act, which became effective in February 1947. Thus, for the first time in Turkey workers and employers were granted the right to establish unions, albeit with certain restrictions. A large number of unions were founded after the act came into force, and the already established associations of workers converted themselves into unions. In 1947 there were 49 unions organizing 33 000 workers. In 1952 the number had spiralled to 246, and their membership to 130 000 (Aslan & Baydar). This led to the founding of a central organisation called *Türk-İş*. By 1954 this organisation had a total of 117 487 members organised in 146 trade unions (Ibid). The new constitution prepared after the military intervention on 27 May 1960 recognised the rights of workers to collective bargaining and strike, while employers were in return legally entitled to declare lockouts. In the following years employers also started to organise themselves in unions. The new regime also allowed unions to exert political influence, though without establishing financial or organic relations with political parties.

The trade union acts that were passed in 1963 formed a turning point in the history of the Turkish trade union movement. The total number of union members rose from 282 967 in 1960 to 834 680 in 1967, and exceeded one million by 1971 (Ibid). The empowerment of the workers led to an increase in labour disputes and strikes. According to Mango (2004:77), “unionised workers, who represented the minority of the labour force, became a privileged class (dubbed ‘the worker aristocracy’) at a time of acute economic distress for the mass of the population”. A strike in late 1966 led to a split in the ranks of *Türk-İş*, and a more radical trade union confederation, *Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (DİSK*; Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions), was formed alongside *Türk-İş*. The split had an obvious political dimension. *Türk-İş* and its affiliates were mostly dominated by supporters of mainstream political parties like *CHP* and the *Adalet Partisi (AP*; Justice Party) – successor of the defunct *Demokrat Parti*, while *DİSK* was dominated by supporters of smaller leftwing parties. The fact that the established political parties backed their own supporters in gaining control over *Türk-İş* was another example of the political elite’s attempt to keep the movement on a tight leash. From the foundation of *DİSK* until the coup in 1980, the competition between the two confederations was the determining feature of the trade union movement in Turkey. But other confederations such as the radical rightwing *Milliyetçi İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (MİSK*; Confederation of Nationalist Trade Unions) – in reality more a political group than a confederation – also put their mark on the ongoing struggle.

Most trade unions and confederations, especially those with leftist sympathies, were cut down to size by the military junta between 1980 and 1983. The unions were accused of inciting and fuelling many of the violent confrontations in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the army had plenty of more or less sound evidence to point the finger at the two radical trade union confederations, the leftwing *DİSK* and the rightwing and nationalist *MİSK*, they seized the opportunity to restrict the power and social impact of all unions, thereby severely reducing the role of organised civil society in Turkey. The new labour laws enacted in July 1983 terminated the cultural and educational role of the unions, and trade unions were redefined solely as organisations with economic and social functions (Aslan & Baydar). Unions were barred from involvement in politics and commerce, and organising meetings outside their stated aims was forbidden. Organisation on a national level became compulsory, and professional unions and federations and enterprise unions were prohibited.

Strong unions with bargaining power didn't fit the picture of Turgut Özal's economic liberalisation either. The unions have thus gradually been sidelined in Turkey during the last 25 years, and few elite politicians reacted when the journalist unions were forced out by the businessmen who entered the media sector in the 1980s (Çatalbaş 2005:11). According to Mango (2004:113), only about 6 per cent of the 8 million regular wage earners and 2 million casual labourers in Turkey were covered by collective wage agreements in 2000.

Trade unions have come under attack from capital forces in the West as well. But there is one vital difference: In Turkey a liberal capitalistic economic system was implemented without strong organisations that could raise concerns and make demands on behalf of wage earners during the process. In other words, economic liberalism was implemented in an authoritarian political setting. In the West civil movements have been able to meet and to some degree fend off this attack. The Turkish case is comparable to the development in countries like Taiwan, Malaysia, China and South Korea, where the regimes have liberalised their economies before increased political and civil rights have been granted – if they have been at all.⁷

6.2. Squeezed out

Sitting behind his desk in a somewhat dark and old-fashioned office in *TGS'* Istanbul branch in Cağaloğlu, Ercan S. Ipekçi does not hesitate to mention people like Aydın Doğan, Cem

⁷ See Lee (2000), Park, Kim & Sohn (2000), Ma (2000) and Nain (2000).

Uzan and Dinç Bilgin when asked to name the organisation's main enemies. It is no coincidence that *TGS*, founded in Istanbul in 1952, has remained loyal to Turkey's own Fleet Street.⁸ Close by lies the headquarters of *Cumhuriyet*, the only Turkish newspaper where *TGS* can conduct negotiations of collective agreements. Turkish law requires that at least 50 per cent of the workers at a workplace and 10 per cent of workers within the relevant sector nationwide are organised in order to start such negotiations. According to Ipekçi, Aydın Doğan agreed to buy *Hürriyet* in 1992 on condition that everybody resigned from the union. "It costs money to sign the papers correct when people resign from the union. Aydın Doğan paid for all. 400-500 resigned from *Milliyet* and *Hürriyet* at that time", he says.⁹ Since then *TGS* has not been able to sign collective agreements in Doğan controlled media outlets. Union organisation has not been possible in outlets that began their publication and broadcasting lives later on, as is the case with all private broadcasters in Turkey, and there has never been union organisation in the other big media conglomerates, according to Ipekçi.¹⁰ In addition to *Cumhuriyet*, *TGS* can sign collective agreements with the semi-official news agency *Anadolu Ajansı* (Anatolia Agency) and the privately owned *Ankara Haber Ajansı* (*ANKA*; Ankara News Agency). Both *ANKA* and *Cumhuriyet* are currently experiencing serious financial problems, and the negotiated collective agreements can not be implemented. Thus, the only news organisation where a collective agreement can be signed in actual sense is *Anadolu Ajansı*. 15 years ago *TGS* could negotiate collective agreements with most of the major newspapers. In 2002 the number of reporters who had unfettered access to union rights was approximately 5 per cent of the total number of workers in the sector, according to statistics from the Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security (International Federation of Journalists 2002:4).

6.2.1. Fire at will

The sidelining of the unions has left the media owners in a position where they can do pretty much as they like. Job security is almost non-existent, and salaries range from the astronomical for top-editors and columnists, to crumbs for many ordinary reporters. The massive layoffs that followed the meltdowns in 2000 and 2001 can serve as example of the conditions. Nobody seems to know exactly how many people got fired. Ipekçi claims the

⁸ Fleet Street was traditionally the home of the British Press. The last major news office, Reuters, left the street in 2005, but the street's name is still used as a synonym for the British national press.

⁹ Ercan S. Ipekçi, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

¹⁰ Ibid.

number is approximately 5000.¹¹ *“Not all of them were reporters. Also other media staff, like printers, drivers etc. were fired. But only 50 of them sued. Most of them thought that they would have their old job back if they didn’t sue. But 80 per cent of the people that were fired will never come back to the business.”*¹² According to Ipekçi the lives of many of the fired media workers have been extremely difficult. To survive many have become street vendors.

*“The big amount of people who got fired, were people who didn’t have any social security. Many were illegally working there. Not as you understand freelance. The government didn’t know that they were working there, and these people didn’t earn any social security rights. The bosses have to pay the government a lot of money in order to secure social security rights for their employees. But they won’t do that. They have no written agreements with these employees.”*¹³

Ipekçi points out that the Turkish media in general was overpopulated in the late 1990s, and that the meltdown provided the owners with an opportunity to increase earnings by getting rid of employees. He claims that the dramatic personal consequences could have been less severe if more media workers had been part of a union. *“It is expensive to be part of the union, so the bosses will not hire that many people. If it happened in a place where the workers were members of a union, the effects of the crisis would have been dealt with in an orderly fashion, like letting off the people who were close to their retiring age first”,* he says.¹⁴

Aslı Tunç (2004:315) provides another angle to the massive layoffs when she writes that it was “a perfect time to get rid of some journalists who had become long time opponents to corruption in Turkish politics and an obvious threat to their boss, media tycoon Aydın Doğan”. Tunç (Ibid) also points out that a “high number of well-educated and liberal-minded female columnists” were among the first ones to be fired, and that they “unquestionably paid the price of creating an emancipated woman’s image in the press”. That the crisis was used as an excuse to get rid of outspoken reporters has been echoed by official spokespersons from journalist organisations in Turkey as well. “The layoffs are not economic but political”, claimed Ceylan Özerengin, spokeswoman for the Journalists Assembly Initiative.¹⁵

¹¹ This corresponds well with other sources. International Federation of Journalists mentions 4800 (2002:4).

¹² Ercan S. Ipekçi, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Collins, Catherine (2001): “Crisis Taking a Toll on Turkey’s Media”, in *Chicago Tribune*, 2 April 2001, p. 4.

Both Ipekçi and Tunç argues that the massive dismissals had a profound effect on the profession because the subsequent fear of layoff caused a consistent reluctance to provide critical investigation and to follow up on corruption claims. One can also argue that the sensational nature of the Turkish media has indirectly worked to the detriment of the social security of reporters.¹⁶ According to Dilruba Çatalbaş, the negative public image of journalism as a profession means that there has been no public outcry after the dismissals.

“Most of the public would not hear or appreciate why it is such a problem for any democratic public sphere if a journalist loses his or her job because of his or her professional integrity. This is a real problem. Journalists are not regarded very highly by the public. (...) Most of the journalistic production are somehow tabloid, sensational and for fun. So for many in the street it would not be a terrible disaster if a journalist loses his or her job.”¹⁷

Çatalbaş points out that the mainstream media kept the coverage of their own crisis and the many personal tragedies that followed in its wake at a minimum. Most people thus didn't appreciate the magnitude of the crisis. It is of course also important to keep in mind that other sectors were hit hard during the crisis. But as I argued in paragraph 3.3.1, sectors dependent upon advertising revenues are among the first to experience difficulties during recessions, and the development in Turkey at the time confirmed this pattern.

TGS and other Turkish NGOs managed to use the crisis to raise international concern about the negative effects of concentration of media ownership on job security, diversity and coverage of sensitive issues. TGS received massive support when the issue was raised on the 24th congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in Seoul in June 2001. This in turn led to an investigation of union rights and press freedom in Turkey instigated by the IFJ, the conclusions of which are presented in the report *“Journalism and The Human Rights Challenge to Turkey: Putting Union Rights and Press Freedom on the Agenda”*. IFJ has since published a number of statements and written a handful of letters to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to support the journalist associations in Turkey through the Turkish IFJ

¹⁶ This is analysed in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.3.1.

¹⁷ Dilruba Çatalbaş, interview with author, Istanbul 14 July 2005.

affiliates *Çağdaş Gazeteciler Derneği* (ÇGD; Progressive Journalists Association)¹⁸ and TGS.¹⁹ IFJ has also lobbied the EU to put pressure on the Turkish government. Harsh criticism voiced in the annual reports prepared by the EU Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession, shows the seriousness of the situation. The Commission has regularly criticised the Turkish Government for not accepting Article 5 and 6 of the European Social Charter on the right to organise, the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike. "In general, Turkey needs to strengthen social dialogue at all levels and develop a culture of social partnership", the Commission concludes (2004:47), and argues that this is especially important in the private sector where bipartite social dialogue "remains virtually non-existent" (Ibid:111). But this in turn raises a troubling paradox: the erosion of job security and social rights of employees has accelerated in a period when Turkey has implemented legislation in accordance with EU demands. In principal speeches in Brussels in connection with accession of new members it has often been highlighted that integration into the EU will boost social dialogue and empower civil movements in the new member states. But when the banquet tables are cleaned and everyday life resumes, who will be the real winners of EU membership, capital owners or civil movements and ordinary wage earners, Ercan S. Ipekçi asks.

6.2.2. Thoughts on EU membership

*"Capital is king in the EU. Big players in the European media look towards Turkey and the countries in the East European block. We've seen the experiences in the East European block. They bought media outlets and used cheap working force, and now they want to do the same in Turkey. We wonder: do the media bosses in Western Europe by buying media in Eastern Europe and Turkey try to escape from the high standards in Western Europe? We hope we will rise to the high standards by joining the EU, but we are uncertain of which standards we will reach: the East European or the West European?"*²⁰

For Ipekçi the prospect of EU-membership is a double-edged sword. He fears that membership will empower Turkish capital owners at the expense of Turkish wage earners, and one cannot but agree that the developments are troubling from a trade union point of view. Trade unions and social security rights have come under attack in many European

¹⁸ The ÇGD represents 'unregistered' journalists who are outside the provisions of Law 212, which would allow them to join the TGS.

¹⁹ The IFJ's declarations on Turkey are collected on the IFJ website:
<http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?issue=mainresult&cntr=TUR&Language=EN&page=1> (09.02.2006)

²⁰ Ercan S. Ipekçi, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

countries because they are seen by many politicians and trendsetting economists as the main obstacle towards further economic growth, which is the leading mantra of the day.

The question of EU membership divides the people I have interviewed for this thesis. Most seem to agree that the standards of transparency and control that EU legislation provides are necessary to fight the pandemic corruption in Turkey. This is the main reason why Aslı Tunç eagerly promotes Turkish membership. She believes it is the only way Turkey can become a truly democratic society. *“Ok, it’s very market orientated, but it’s a fact of the world, so you can’t change that. But at least we will have some kind of ethic codes, some definitions of journalism and good reporting etc”*, she argues.²¹

Editor-in-chief Mehmet T. Sucu of *Cumhuriyet* has a different approach. He does not believe in a democratic miracle cure from the EU that will solve all economic and political problems in Turkey. Sucu advocates that true change can only come from within, and that Turks have to fight themselves for improved socio-economic conditions. *“I do not accept the defeat. I want to take these benefits with my own power, not with anyone else’s help”*, he says.²²

Mustafa Sönmez argues that it is the conglomerate nature of the Turkish media sector that is the real obstacle. As long as the media owners view their outlets as a political rather than a profit-generating investment, the rules that regulate a profit-driven free-market is not applicable to the Turkish media anyway, and there is little the EU can do about that. Sönmez argues that a restructuring of the business profile of the big conglomerates that operate in the media sector is the only way to create a climate where profit is the driving force behind media investments, not politics. *“The revenue cannot sustain all the media outlets, so there must be a selection. Some should be closed. If external economies are narrowed, they will not be able to pay the loss, and all players will play by the rule in a profit-oriented way”*, he says.²³

Editor Arif Dizdaroğlu of the Doğan owned *Hürriyet* believes that Turkish EU membership is a necessity to improve the quality and diversity of Turkish media. He argues that increased living standards in Turkey will lead to more money being spent on buying newspapers and magazines, and more money being poured into advertising. This will in turn create a more

²¹ Aslı Tunç, interview with author, Kadıköy, Istanbul 18 July 2005.

²² Mehmet T. Sucu, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

²³ Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

professional and profit-oriented climate in the media sector.²⁴ Another Doğan employee, program director Başar Başarır of CNN Türk, is also pro-EU. He believes membership will lead to a decrease in the number of media outlets because all will be forced to be more profit-oriented. This will in turn lead to an increase in quality, he argues.²⁵

Dilruba Çatalbaş reasons that EU membership will force Turkey to apply more transparent and democratic governance. But she is uncertain if integration into a highly developed and commercial free-market system like the EU will provide more public discussion of what I in paragraph 5.4.2 in this thesis called the “new taboos”, namely the workings and effects of the free-market economy. She argues that the commercial free-market mentality has already infiltrated into “*each and every compartment*” of most media outlets in Turkey.²⁶ Çatalbaş has first-hand knowledge of the increasing commercialisation of the Turkish public sphere. She is associate professor in Journalism at the University of Galatasaray, beautifully located by the Bosphorus in buildings that used to be part of the Çiragan Palace, built by the Ottoman Sultan Abdülaziz in 1874. One of the auditoriums at the university is named after Aydın Doğan. “*He sponsored some event here, and they named the auditorium after him. They didn’t ask us at the communications department first*”, she says.

As these quotes show, EU membership is seen both as a cure and a disease. It depends on the perspective applied. Tunç and Çatalbaş are strong advocates of the implementation of regulatory regimes like the ones at work in most EU-countries. This will provide some basic ethical and legal ground rules that will help increase transparent democratic governance in the political and economic spheres, they argue. But my interviewees take different positions regarding the market orientated political implications of membership. The fault line here seems to be political. Sucu and Sönmez are outspoken in their belief in socialist values and social liberalism, and thus sceptical towards the capitalist free-for-all approach, while Başarır and Dizdaroğlu advocate the necessity of such an approach for raising the economic living standards in Turkey. The impression of the IFJ investigation team after meeting with top Doğan-executives in 2002 could be a suiting punch line: “the delegation was left with the very strong impression that the company sees its future within the EU but without recognizing the European standards on social relations” (International Federation of Journalists 2002:9). But it

²⁴ Arif Dizdaroğlu, interview with author, Güneşli, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

²⁵ Başar Başarır, interview with author, İkitelli, Istanbul 25 January 2005.

²⁶ Dilruba Çatalbaş, interview with author, Istanbul 14 July 2005.

is more tempting to end with Ipekçi's open question to the EU: *...we are uncertain of which standards we will reach: the East European or the West European?*²⁷

6.3. Human Rights

Being a frontline soldier for human rights in Turkey is a risky business. 11 executives and members of the *İnsan Hakları Derneği (İHD; Human Rights Association)* have been murdered after the organisation was founded in 1986,²⁸ and many more have been wounded, imprisoned, tortured and harassed, among them former chairman Akın Birdal, whose dramatic story was told in paragraph 5.3.3. The story behind the attempt on Birdal's life shows that powerful forces in Turkey – in this case senior generals in the army were allegedly involved in the smear campaign that preceded the shooting of Birdal – are willing to use any means possible to silence critics. Birdal survived the attempt, but many of the human rights monitors of the *İHD* and reporters from small independent outlets who exposed the cruelty carried out by Turkish security forces, the *PKK* and other armed groups during the fighting in south-eastern Turkey in the 1990s, were not so lucky. During the period in question the *İHD* has operated with legal authorisation to monitor human rights developments in Turkey. Here I will elaborate on a couple of cases to expose the gravity of the situation. These cases are however inseparable from another Turkish phenomenon, the so-called “deep state”.

6.3.1. The deep state

Although it is widely used, the term “deep state” is not a very well defined concept in its Turkish context. Descriptions like “a shadowy network involving the military and intelligence apparatus as well as the state bureaucracy” are common.²⁹ Who actually controls this “shadowy network”, and how it is organised, is often left in obscurity. But the idea that there exists “two states” in Turkey is so imbedded that former president and prime minister Süleyman Demirel have referred to the existence of an organised “deep state” as a fact beyond doubt. In an interview in November 2005 Demirel is quoted as saying that “there is one deep state and one other state (...) The state that should be real is the spare one, the one that should be spare is the real one.”³⁰ Only by analysing the most prominent cases involving players acting on behalf of the alleged “deep state” is it possible to somehow personify this abstract

²⁷ Ercan S. Ipekçi, interview with author, Cağaloğlu, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

²⁸ For a list of murdered members of see: <http://www.ihd.org.tr/eindex.html> (15.02.2006)

²⁹ Phillips, David L. (2004): *Turkey's Generals in Retreat*. <http://www.cfr.org/publication.html?id=6944> (08.03.2006)

³⁰ Gorvett, Jon (2006): *Turkey's "Deep State" Surfaces in Former President's Words, Deeds in Kurdish Town*. http://www.washington-report.org/archives/Jan_Feb_2006/0601037.html (08.03.2006)

construction. A rather complex web of more or less institutionalised ties between criminal gangs – mainly the armed ultra-nationalist groups and the powerful families of the Turkish and Kurdish mafias – and various groups representing the state – mainly various security organisations like the *Jandarma İstihbarat Teşkilatı (JITEM; Gendarme Intelligence Agency)* – comes to the fore.³¹ The ultra-nationalist groups, variably referred to as the *ülküçüler* (idealists) or the Grey Wolves, have a long history of close links with the security apparatus. Turkish and international organisations have collected a large body of evidence which shows that these groups served the government in a dirty war against the Kurds and any Turk who supported the Kurds or raised criticism against the governments handling of the open conflict with *PKK* in the 1980s and 1990s.³² Many of their victims were reporters and human rights defenders. Both Semra Özal, the late Turgut Özal's wife, and Tansu Çiller have been named in connection with these gangs (Zürcher 2004:322).

The existence of close links between the state, the mafia and the ultra-nationalists seemed to be confirmed when a car was crushed in a road accident in the western town of Susurluk on 3 November 1996. Four people were in the car: a senior police officer, a pro-government Kurdish chief, a former beauty queen and a former terrorist who had killed seven leftist students in the late seventies (Zürcher 2004:322-323). He was supposedly on the run, but turned out to be holding an official VIP passport. The quartet had just returned from a seaside resort, where Interior Minister Mehmet Ali Ağar also had been staying. The public outcry that followed the incident forced the authorities to start an extensive investigation that eventually led to the sentencing of two officers from the security police to six years in prison. But many still believe that bigger fishes should have been fried, and that the low rank security officers were simply sacrificed to satisfy the public.

On 9 November 2005 an incident in the south-eastern town of Şemdinli again made the “deep state” front-page news.³³ Around lunchtime that day a white car stopped outside the bookstore *Umut* (Hope), run by Seferi Yılmaz. Yılmaz is widely thought to have been a sympathiser of

³¹ A more narrow definition of the “deep state”, sometimes voiced in Turkish media, holds that it is a hangover from the Cold War, when Western powers sought to establish a network of armed groups that would stay behind in countries that might have fallen to the Soviet bloc. While these groups were abolished in most countries after the Soviet Union collapsed, the theory is that in Turkey this unofficial underground army continues to operate.

³² Human Rights Watch (1999); Lawyers Committee for Human Rights & Crowley Program in International Human Rights (1999); Human Rights Watch Internet-site: <http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=europe&c=turkey> (10.03.2006).

³³ Jones, Gareth (2005): *Bombing throws spotlight on Turkey's 'deep state'*. (Reuters) <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=28558> (10.03.2006)

the *PKK*, and had served a long stint in gaol for alleged *PKK* membership. One of the occupants in the car threw a bomb into the bookstore. Yılmaz was killed and another man was seriously wounded in the following explosion. The bomber ran back to the car, but the crowd pursued him and surrounded the vehicle. A tussle then ensued, and the occupants of the car reportedly opened fire, killing another man and wounding four others seriously.³⁴ When the police arrived they arrested the four occupants of the car, but by then people in the crowd had broken into the vehicle, reportedly discovering several AK-47 assault rifles, a *JITEM* ID-card and a “hit list” of other targets.³⁵ When the police prepared to prosecute the four arrested men, they confirmed that three were sergeants in *JITEM*, while the person who allegedly carried out the bombing was a *PKK* informant.³⁶ Two of the *JITEM* sergeants and the *PKK* informant have been indicted.³⁷ The discovery that the bombing apparently had been an operation of *JITEM*—one of the most notorious of the undercover security services operating in Turkey—sparked fury among the local, mainly ethnic Kurdish population. Rioting ensued for days, and spread to other Kurdish communities across the country. It was in connection with the Şemdinli bombing that Süleyman Demirel made his statement about Turkey’s “two states” referred to above.

The handling of the affair by Turkish politicians is by many seen as confirming the view that elected politicians are not able to control state-sponsored groups who operate outside the law.³⁸ The November 25 meeting at the prime ministry with military officials has been interpreted as a symbol of this state of affairs. When the Şemdinli affair hit the front pages, the *AKP* government and the opposition in parliament agreed to set up an official enquiry. After the November 25 meeting many politicians retreated from this enthusiasm for a full investigation. This happened after the military had criticised the politicians for linking the incident to the “deep state”, stressing instead that it was more likely a settling of accounts between various Kurdish groups. Commander of the Turkish Land Forces, General Yaşar Büyükanıt, even publicly vouched for one of the sergeants, stating “*Tanırım, iyi çocuktur*” (“I

³⁴ Gorratt, Jon (2006): *Turkey’s “Deep State” Surfaces in Former President’s Words, Deeds in Kurdish Town.* http://www.washington-report.org/archives/Jan_Feb_2006/0601037.html (08.03.2006)

³⁵ Zaman (2005): *Susurluk Case Suspicion over Incidents in Semdinli.* <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=national&alt=&hn=26294> (11.03.2006)

³⁶ Turkish Daily News (2005): *Government on alert as violence in Hakkari persists.* <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=28483> (10.03.2006)

³⁷ Turkish Daily News (2006): *Indictment continues to rattle Parliament.* <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=37793>

³⁸ Gorratt, Jon (2006): *Turkey’s “Deep State” Surfaces in Former President’s Words, Deeds in Kurdish Town.* http://www.washington-report.org/archives/Jan_Feb_2006/0601037.html (08.03.2006)

know him, he is a good kid”),³⁹ indicating that the sergeant probably was innocent of any crime. Following the army's public relations campaign, the prominent newspaper columnist Gündüz Aktan argued that the bombing could have been staged by the *PKK* itself.⁴⁰ But Aktan does not explain how the *PKK* could have managed to involve the *JITEM*. His article reflects the respect many Turkish reporters have for the army.

One of the major stories in the Turkish media at the time of writing is the accusation against general Büyükanıt made by a public prosecutor in the city of Van in connection with the Şemdinli bombing. Prosecutor Ferhat Sarıkaya has claimed that the general and several of his subordinates set up a criminal organisation when Büyükanıt was a regional commander in the Southeast in the late 1990s.⁴¹ The accusation implies that the bombing in Şemdinli was carried out by elements of this criminal organisation.⁴² Some voices have even claimed that the real goal behind this and a number of other blasts in the region lately has been to create unrest and thus “wreck Turkey’s European Union entry talks”.⁴³ What really happened in Şemdinli on 9 November is still not clear, but the ensuing dispute has made the affair and its alleged connections to the “deep state” top news for weeks on end.⁴⁴ Some claim that the existence of a “deep state” is severely exaggerated, while others claim that incidents like the Şemdinli bombing proves that it is a powerful player. Jon Gorrivett argues that the existence of the “deep state” is one of the most serious problems facing Turkey today. “Dealing with this second state will therefore likely be the biggest challenge facing the government in the years ahead, as its efforts to match European Union standards in particular oblige it to try and unify the mechanisms of power, bringing them under electoral control.”⁴⁵ One could also add that dealing with the “deep state” implies dealing with the military's hold on democratic institutions, and the mainstream medias' reluctance to criticise the powerful generals.

³⁹ Keskin, Adnan & Arikanoglu, Soner (2006): *İddianame: Büyükanıt askerlerle çete kurdu* (Indictment: Büyükanıt set up (illegal) armed band with soldiers) <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=180659> (10.03.2006)

⁴⁰ Aktan, Gündüz (2005): *The problem worsens (I)*.
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=28828> (10.03.2006)

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bozkurt, Göksel (2006): *Commission chairman admits leak*.
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=37709> (10.03.2006)

⁴³ Turkish Daily News (2006): *Şemdinli dominates Turkey in more ways than one*.
<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=37944> (12.03.2006)

⁴⁴ Radikal (2006): *Şemdinli müebbetlik* (Perpetual Şemdinli)
<http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=180376> (10.03.2006)

⁴⁵ Gorrivett, Jon (2006): *Turkey’s “Deep State” Surfaces in Former President’s Words, Deeds in Kurdish Town*.
http://www.washington-report.org/archives/Jan_Feb_2006/0601037.html (08.03.2006)

6.3.2. Fighting human rights defenders

When Vedat Aydın, one of the founders of the Diyarbakır branch of the *İHD* and the chairman of the *Halkın Emek Partisi* (*HEP*; People's Labour Party), was taken from his home on 5 July 1991 by several armed men who allegedly identified themselves as police officers, the Turkish public was still largely unaware of the seriousness of the dirty war conducted by elements of the “deep state”. Aydın's body was found at a roadside outside of Diyarbakır three days later. His skull was fractured, his legs broken, and his body contained more than a dozen bullet wounds.⁴⁶ Although many names have been mentioned over the years, his killers have never been identified and prosecuted by the authorities. The killing of Aydın was one of the first of the 1500 or so ‘murders by persons unknown’ that reached the headlines and raised suspicion that there was an organised dirty war going on in the Southeast. The suspicion that groups on state payrolls had taken part in the killing was further strengthened when Fewzi Veznedaroğlu, Aydın's successor as chairman of the *İHD* in Diyarbakır, was told on 25 December 1992 by two plain clothes police officers in front of the *İHD* building that he would end up like the others – referring in particular to Aydın – if he didn't stop his activities.⁴⁷

The murder of Aydın was not the first politically motivated killing in Turkey. But for many it marks the beginning of a systematic regime of harassment of human rights defenders in the 1990s. Seen in a broader context this bears evidence of the fragile state of Turkish civil society. That the Turkish state only has been able to find the killers of a handful of the at least 1500 people representing civil society that have been murdered by “persons unknown”, can either indicate that people on the state's payroll are involved, or that there exists powerful organised criminal networks that the state is powerless to fight. The implications of both these explanations are grave for the Turkish political system. It is also worrying that it takes scandals like the Şemdinli and Susurluk affairs for the mainstream media to raise a public debate about the issue. Many hope that the progress towards accession in the EU will improve the situation, and the amount of killings by “persons unknown” has decreased after the turn of the millennium. However, recent developments show that there exist other effective means to fight off challenges from civil society.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch (1992): *Annual Report 1992: Turkey*. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1992/WR92/HSW-06.htm> (15.02.2006)

⁴⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1994): *Question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the world, with particular reference to colonial and other dependent countries and territories*. Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. <http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/d5c155469bdbb7ab80256738003eb7e3?Opendocument> (16.02.2006)

The Special Representative of the UN's Secretary-General on human rights defenders argues that the continuing hostility between human rights groups and authorities is the result of "an extremely polarized environment" (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders 2005:13). The seeds to this "polarized environment" were sown at the beginning of the open conflict in the southeast when organisations and some independent media outlets started to denounce abuses by the state and call for the state to respect the rights of the Kurdish population. The Kurdish armed groups had a similar political agenda, "and despite their peaceful activities, defenders were perceived by many as siding with the armed groups and thus heavily targeted (Ibid:14)." It is telling that the supervision of NGOs in Turkey until recently was the responsibility of the police and the security services. This is still the case with trade unions.

The Special Representative in her report argues that recent constitutional amendments and legislative reforms in Turkey have "greatly strengthened the prospects for change in areas critical for the promotion and protection of human rights" (Ibid:4).⁴⁸ But the report concludes that the reforms have relaxed but not removed restrictions (Ibid:9). There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the large number of recently established human rights boards and councils both at government, provincial and district levels are all controlled by the state. Independent human rights defenders have been reluctant to participate in these boards and questioned the principle of having a state body investigating violations committed by state agents. Most board members are representatives of the state or political parties in power, and the boards are dependent on governors to provide them with offices and secretarial support, as they have no budget of their own (Ibid:12). Secondly, although the personal safety of human rights defenders has improved, the number of court cases brought against them has increased. The *IHD* has reported that while 300 cases were opened against their organisation from 1986 to 2000, more than 450 cases had been opened during the first three years of the new millennium (Ibid:17). Some individuals have had more than 50 cases brought against them. Media outlets and reporters that have questioned the state's commitment to international human rights standards have also been targeted. Although the number of cases leading to

⁴⁸ For an overview of international human rights treaties Turkey has ratified and recent constitutional amendments and legislative reforms, see Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders 2005:5-9.

prison sentences has decreased, many result in heavy fines.⁴⁹ Thirdly, many judges in lower level courts have been reluctant to implement the reforms, or simply used alternative legal provisions to prosecute human rights defenders. The Special Representative (2005:21) argues that the “existence of pockets of resistance within the State” is the main cause for this. “Overall, authorities continue to consider human rights defenders with great hostility”, and “all but one of the security chiefs, a number of governorship representatives and prosecutors, during their meeting with the Special Representative, linked human rights defenders to terrorist activities and organizations”.

6.4. Concluding remarks

Atatürk set out to create a strong state in Turkey. Nobody knows how much power he would have been willing to share with other forces in society, had he still been alive and in charge when the democratic winds first blew over Turkey in the late 1940s. But we do know that since his days there have been powerful elements within the state hierarchy that sees any criticism against the nature of the state and any challenge towards the exclusive Turkish character of the nation as an evil that must be fought at all costs. Such a starting point is in and of itself not compatible with the basic principles manifested in international human rights treaties. One can consequently argue that the troubles facing human rights defenders in Turkey is of a more fundamental nature than the troubles facing trade unions. While the former is concerned with liberating the overall cultural and political spheres, the later is mainly concerned with securing the individual rights of their members. But the bottom line is that they face the same fundamental obstacle: the authoritarian nature of leadership in Turkey. The Commission of the European Communities (2004:47) does not exaggerate when they point out that: “In general, Turkey needs to strengthen social dialogue at all levels and develop a culture of social partnership”. This is reflected in the media bosses reluctance to allow their employees to join a union, and in the state’s reluctance to let civil movements participate on an equal footing in the monitoring of human rights. The former and current Turkish governments may have had the best of intentions at mind when they decided to establish hundreds of human rights councils and boards across the country. But as long as these boards are controlled by the state, and they don’t yield any tangible positive results on the overall mentality towards respecting human rights, they appear as little more than window dressing.

⁴⁹ As organisations do not acquire legal personality to shield board members from direct responsibility, as is the case in most countries, all members of an association are personally liable for payment of fines in Turkey.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”¹

“There are limits in every field, and freedom should be defined; otherwise, some groups infringe on the freedom of belief of other groups.”²

Should there be limitations on freedom of speech? The question is still as relevant as it was when the French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778) fought against the repressive hands of the Roman Catholic Church and the French government. A quarter of a millennium later Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in connection with a row over caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, argues that freedom of expression should indeed be defined and limited. However, there is one major difference between the contemporary situation and the situation in the era of the Enlightenment: It is no longer only governments and religious establishments that have the power to infringe on free speech and pluralism. In many modern societies the threat is as likely to come from major business interests that control the mainstream media. Censorship has increasingly been privatised.

The Turkish state set up by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his fellow republicans was all embracing and authoritarian in character. The principles of separation of powers and the sovereignty of the people had no place in Atatürk's grand modernising and westernising project. Although democracy was introduced 60 years ago, the tradition of authoritarian leadership is still an important factor in Turkey. The major private enterprises that started to appear during the liberal 1950s and got a new boost during the 1980s have in many ways adopted this tradition. The founding families keep them on a tight leash, many of the largest ones – Sabancı, Koç and Doğan – are known by the surname of the founding families, and few of them are traded publicly. Although these enterprises have grown into major conglomerates with interests in a long line of businesses, the owners still keep them under tight control by organising their portfolio in a holding company where all major decisions are taken and strategic plans decided. Such an ownership structure was ideal for Turgut Özal when he in the 1980s wanted to liberalise the economy without jeopardising his hold on

¹ This famous quotation is commonly misattributed to Voltaire, but is actually a summary of his attitudes by biographer Evelyn Beatrice Hall (under the pseudonym of S. G. Tallentyre) in her book *“The Friends of Voltaire”* from 1906. Hall based her summary on statements Voltaire made in *“Essay on Tolerance”*.

² Zaman (2006): *“Erdoğan on Al-Jazeera: Freedom should be defined”*.
<http://www.zaman.com/?bl=hotnews&alt=&trh=20060209&hn=29555> (17.03.2006)

power. Özal nursed the relationship with a handful of government friendly big league business owners by handing out economic incentives and lucrative government deals, and managed to institutionalise an effective regime of trade-off. Three concurrent developments made this scheme particularly successful: the depoliticisation of the public sphere carried out by the military junta in the early 1980s, the continuing strong role of the state in the economy despite political rhetoric to the contrary, and the transfer of most major media outlets to big multiactivity conglomerates. The fact that the most popular newspapers ended up in the hands of businessmen with an economic interest in nursing their relations with the state, meant that Özal with his strong political base and personal authority could control the situation.

But as I have argued in this thesis, not all governments have been in a position to enjoy the spoils of the trade-off regime. Only strong leaders supported by the army have had the upper hand over the media conglomerates. The political landscape in Turkey is dotted with political parties, and Turkish voters have a reputation for political unfaithfulness. Only Özal and Erdoğan have enjoyed long uninterrupted stretches at the helm since the army returned Turkey to civilian rule in 1983. The 1990s saw a number of weak coalition governments, and no single politician stood out as the natural choice of leader. Neither Necmettin Erbakan nor Tansu Çiller was able to instigate successful trade-off regimes, and both had a hard time with the conglomerate media. In the case of Erbakan it could be argued that his political agenda was to destroy the trade-off arrangement altogether. The fluctuating political landscape is the major difference between Turkey and many of the other authoritarian states that have liberalised their economy in the same period, for instance Taiwan, Malaysia and South Korea. Studies of state-media relations in these countries show that trade-off regimes have been particularly successful because there have been political stability in the form of one political party that have enjoyed long and uninterrupted tenures in office. This has created stability in the economic sphere, but not improved the conditions for democracy and pluralism.

Turkish political leaders that have been unable to instigate an effective trade-off regime, have either like Erbakan tried to break the arrangement altogether by challenging the power of the media owners, or like Mesut Yılmaz made greater concessions to them. This touches upon another characteristics of the Turkish media landscape: that it is not self-sustainable. The Turkish media market is very small compared to Western markets, and Turks spend less of their money on media consumption than Western consumers. But this is not the whole story. Most Turkish media outlets are owned by major conglomerates, which can finance the losses

by transferring money from their other businesses. This means that there are more money spent on media production than media consumption, and the Turkish media sector can consequently not be analysed solely as profit-oriented business. The natural selection that would occur in a competition regulated and driven market has not materialised, and we have to look for competing motives to why Turkish businessmen invest in the media business. I argue in this thesis that the political dimension is an important factor to explain this discrepancy. From a critical political economy perspective this is not a problem in and of itself. Media ownership in the hands of political parties or pressure groups can strengthen pluralism in society as long as there are sufficient checks and balances in place. But in Turkey there are no effective mechanisms to secure diversity and curb undue influence from powerful media owners. They have an almost all-mighty position within the hierarchy in their own business operations, they can do business with the state on equal terms with other business owners who do not have interests in the media sector, and it is almost an accepted fact of life that they use their outlets to secure benefits for their business operations. The fact that most of these business owners also share the same political vision for Turkey, a vision that is eagerly promoted through the *Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği* (*Tüsiad*; Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association), makes it even more untenable. To recapitulate a quotation from Mustafa Sönmez:

“They all believe that the liberal economy is the right one, globalisation is the right way and making agreements with the IMF is the right preference. They have a consensus about these macro principles. This is in politics too, not only in economics. They are secular, and they have a pro-EU view.”³

If we on top of all this add that Turkey have a weak civil society, no generally accepted professional codes of ethics, no effective legislation to curb cross-media ownership, and no editorial agreements to secure the independence of the editorial staff, the conclusion is that the better part of the media market is controlled by a handful of private individuals with a vested interest in a certain political development. The existence of diversity and pluralism in Turkey are thus dependent upon the goodwill of a few powerful owners who, at least on paper, are accountable to none but themselves. If we take into account the many cases of media owners who have interfered in the democratic process, the totality of the situation appears worrying.

³ Mustafa Sönmez, interview with author, Kabataş, Istanbul 19 July 2005.

The media system in place in Turkey today is a highly commercial one, and is as such in many ways a replica of the systems in place in most free-market societies. The major problem is that the regulatory regimes that have followed the development of such a media system in most Western countries have not been adopted. Private television initially developed in a legal limbo in terms of the business side, while freedom of expression was controlled on many sides. Business legislation thus had to follow in the footsteps of investors and businessmen, and not in dialogue between authorities and private interests. Civil society was never invited to the party in the first place. Seen in light of this, the implementation of EU legislation is a step in the right direction. It is also possible to discern signs of a development towards a more specialised business climate. Due to the meltdowns in 2000 and 2001 many media groups either sold or lost their banks, and Aydın Doğan recently sold his bank to a Benelux based company. The connection between banks and media groups has arguably been the most corrupting part of the Turkish media sector. Owning a bank could provide almost unlimited cash flow in the laxly regulated banking days of the 1990s, and good relations with the government would ease things greatly if one wanted to buy one of the smaller state banks about to be privatised. The media groups thus had funds easily available to cover their losses in the media sector. The triangle of finance, politics and the media constituted the corrupting nursery for the emerging Turkish private broadcasters in the 1990s. In the absence of a media policy, the interplay of these three factors to a large degree determined how the sector would structure itself and operate. The connection between finance and media is now about to be broken, and the media owners have lost their most important economic lifeline. One element in the corrupted triangle will thus be eliminated. If and when effective checks and balances to limit undue political interference from media owners are implemented, this dark chapter in the history of the Turkish media might finally be closed.

But there are still many tripwires. The chronic troubles of the Turkish economy and the as yet unsolved ethnic and religious conflicts that have plagued the young republic have the potential to wreck havoc again. The extent to which Turkey is able to solve or learn to live peacefully with these conflicts is closely tied to the future prospects of freedom of speech and pluralism. As long as there are powerful interests in Turkey – the army, the “deep state” and various militant ethnic and religious groups – that are not willing to make compromises on such issues as the role of religion in society, the cultural rights of minorities and the sanctity of the state, it is hard to see how the ideal of a truly vibrant, pluralistic and free media can be

accomplished any time soon. The fragile state of Turkish civil society is also troubling. If employees are left out of the process of forming the Turkish media landscape, it is a danger that this landscape exclusively will cater to the needs and interests of owners and politicians. What I find particularly worrying is the fact that the attack on trade unions continues with unabated force despite the recent political reforms demanded by the EU. My research does not allow me to make substantial conclusions to the effect that the EU does not take the well-being of Turkish civil society as seriously as the well-being of the Turkish free market and major business interests. But for the many Turks who believe that membership in the EU will solve all the political ills in Turkish society, it should clearly be a cause for concern and inspire academics and journalists to investigate the field more thoroughly.

I have in this thesis presented many arguments to support my initial claim that the consequences of concentrated media ownership are more serious in Turkey than in most Western countries. What lessons can media theorists learn from the Turkish case? The first thing that springs to mind, is that theoretical perspectives on media ownership has to take into account the dilemma of economic liberalisation vs. political liberalisation. Many political scientists has pointed out that a well-functioning democracy seems to be dependent upon a certain level of prosperity. This argument echoes Turgut Özal's (1991:308) claim that economic reforms must precede cultural and political reforms for a country to prosper. My own findings indicate that market size indeed is an important determinant for media diversity. The problems with such an approach seen in light of the Turkish case is that NGOs and the public in general will have few means for active participation in the development, and that the business climate and thus the privately owned media to a large degree will be shaped and controlled by a political and economic elite. This becomes especially untenable when major multiactivity conglomerates with organic financial links with the state control the media. Such a climate leaves the door wide open for clientelism and outright corruption, exemplified by the informal networks between politicians and big business owners documented in this thesis. Neither the liberal nor the critical political economy perspective provides a sufficient frame for analysis of such a media environment. A new perspective that conceives of the media as being a check both on public and private power, and highlights the convergence of interests between these groups as witnessed in many late-industrialising countries, will be a major step on the road towards a de-westernising of Media Studies.

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Albayrak Group: <http://www.albayrak.com.tr/#>

Asya Finans: <http://www.asyafinans.com.tr/>

BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Bloomberg: <http://www.bloomberg.com>

CIA World Fact Book: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

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Dođan Yayın Holding: <http://www.dyh.com.tr>
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Forbes: <http://www.forbes.com>
Freedom House: <http://www.freedomhouse.org>
Hürriyet: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/anasayfa/>
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Index On Censorship: <http://www.indexonline.org/>
İnsan Hakları Derneđi (İHD; Human Rights Association): <http://www.ihd.org.tr/>
International Federation of Journalists: <http://www.ifj.org/>
International Press Institute: <http://www.freemedia.at>
Merkez Dađıtım Pazarlama (MDP; Merkez Distribution Marketing Industry and Trade Inc.):
<http://www.mdp.com.tr/tr/home/>
Milliyet: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/>
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Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu (RTÜK; Supreme Board of Radio and Television):
<http://www.rtuk.org.tr>
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