

A Survey on Turkish-Armenian Relations
and Armenia in Turkish Media
2006-2009

October 2009

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1.Scope of the Survey

The survey of the Turkish press covers five daily newspapers: **Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Yeni Safak** and **Zaman**. On the one hand this choice is quite obvious: these five titles represent main groups and tendencies of the media in Turkey. They also cover “main stream” and smaller, so-called “serious” titles. On the other hand, the choice requires explanation in the sense that it excludes certain titles that cover the Armenian-Turkish relations and the Armenian issue more often and might yield more “typical” headlines, i.e. the newspapers **Yeni Çağ** and **Ortadoğu** associated with the ultra-nationalist MHP (National Action Party) or **Akit/Vakit** which is an independent, vocal and angry Islamic daily.

It would not be unreasonable to expect that the above mentioned three dailies and some others would yield headlines and stories that were ethno-centrally biased, more angry, and therefore more nationalistic, or even xenophobic. Yet, one has to take into account two facts: These papers are considered “marginal” by a wide part of the public opinion. And in a more tangible way, their circulation numbers prove that they are marginal. None of them sell more than 10-15.000 copies, and some are truly party political bulletins. Therefore their impact is too limited to be taken into account in a general survey of the national media.

We have chosen five newspapers: **Hurriyet** and **Radikal** are part of the Dogan Media Group, which was in discord and conflict with the government in an increasingly serious degree in the period of our survey. **Sabah** changed ownership three times recently, first it was under public custody in the hands of the TMSF (The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund, which administers the assets of bankrupt banks), then it was sold to a newcomer to the media, then went back to the TMSF custody and then was auctioned to a new owner, Çalık Group, that has close relations with the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan. **Zaman** is closely linked to the Fethullah Gulen movement with wide-ranging media, business, education and social network interests. **Yeni Safak** is independent, but its publishers are close to the Prime Minister, and the ruling party AKP.

In terms of circulation, Yeni Safak and Radikal are considered “small” whereas Hurriyet, Sabah and Zaman were the three leading dailys during the period of our survey. (We have to note that the circulation figures of Zaman -and Yeni Safak to a certain degree- are subject of a fierce debate in the Turkish media sector. Zaman has some ** thousand over-the-counter sale, the rest is subscriptions. Many contest the validity of these subscriptions. The debate torpedoed the attempt to establish an independent circulation audit system in the country.)

For some questions of our analysis we arranged these five titles in a right-left axis: ie, Yeni Safak-Zaman-Sabah-Hurriyet-Radikal. Yet one has to take into account that it is extremely difficult to classify Turkish newspapers in terms of their politics and political affiliations. First of all, the terms “left” and “right” don’t have much relevance in the classical meanings of these terms. As it is the case with Turkish political parties, the main titles of the Turkish media all claim to occupy the “center” of the political/ideological spectrum. Zaman and Yeni Safak are considered by many “Islamic” and some of their editorial choices might justify this, yet they have many liberal names among their commentators and some of them are even non-believers. Sabah and Hurriyet are truly “supermarkets” of ideas. Radikal must be considered the most liberal among these titles.

A survey of the web: The next step

Our survey does not cover any web sites although we consider the cyber world an important platform, particularly for an emotionally charged subject like the Turkish-Armenian relations. Yet, in Turkey and in Turkish, the main source for the news on the web is the internet sites of the newspapers and television stations. There are very few independent news sites that have their own resources for newsgathering and their own writers and commentators, for most part and for the time being, the seemingly independent news sites on the web are basically “cut-and-paste” operations piggybacking on the “old” media.

2. Content Analysis Results

2.1. Frequency

The five titles we surveyed have published some 450 items with the keywords “Armenia” and “Armenian” during the months of September and April of 2006, 2007 and 2008; and during the month of April of 2009.

Most of these stories are published in the months of April, the period of the “Armenian issue” for the Turkish media. The reason doesn’t require lengthy explanation: On the 24th of April, we have the anniversary of 1915, and the ever increasing suspense of what the commemorative message from the White House would or would not contain.

The spread of these items among the five titles is as follows:

Yeni Safak:	59
Zaman	76
Sabah:	86
Hurriyet	105
Radikal	115

Count

		009									Total
		News	Interview	Commentary	Analysis	Investigation	Review	Essay	Monitoring	Other	
tarih	April 2006	30	2	13	7	0	2	0	2	3	59
	September 2006	31	0	6	5	2	0	0	1	1	46
	April 2007	23	6	9	0	1	0	0	1	1	41
	September 2007	26	1	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	37
	April 2008	15	1	8	1	0	0	1	0	1	27
	September 2008	62	1	43	2	0	0	0	0	0	108
	April 2009	43	5	67	4	0	0	0	0	1	120
	Total	234	16	154	21	3	2	1	4	7	438

2.2. Genre: A world where people don't speak directly to others

The coverage consists mostly of news stories (almost 53%), commentary and analysis following closely with almost 40% of the items surveyed.

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	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid News	234	52,9	52,9	52,9
Interview	16	3,6	3,6	56,6
Commentary	154	34,8	34,8	91,4
Analysis	21	4,8	4,8	96,2
Investigation	3	,7	,7	96,8
Review	2	,5	,5	97,3
Essay	1	,2	,2	97,5
Monitoring	4	,9	,9	98,4
Other	7	1,6	1,6	100,0
Total	442	100,0	100,0	

A notable absence is interviews (only 3,6% of items) which would have been a very appropriate vehicle to convey the views, thoughts and emotions in an issue that has clear sides and prominent actors. Interviews should have been the most logical editorial choice to explain the views of one side to the other, and vice versa. Their lack can be the sign of two factors: Either the media lacks the desire to tell the other side's story or the actors in this conflict-laden issue are not willing to tell their own stories. Here, one has to keep in mind the unwillingness of the politicians to talk openly and sincerely on an issue that always incites negative reactions from a considerable part of the public opinion.

2.3. Style:

Whatever the genre, the authors of the articles prefer a style that mixes facts and comments: 62% of all articles have facts and comments, 31% have only facts, and some 6% contain pure commentary.

This stylistic choice is reflected in the analytical depth of the articles surveyed. Only 22% of the articles present the events. The rest have an analytical depth starting with the events and the reasons behind them (12%), going to the level of the events, their reasons and their prehistory (21%), and reaching the analytical complexity of representing the events, their reasons, prehistory, immediate as well as future consequences (19 %).

Article presents the events	22%
Article presents the events + their reasons	12%
Article presents the events + their reasons + the prehistory	21%
Article presents the events + their reasons + immediate consequences	7%
Article presents the events + their reasons + prehistory + immediate & future consequences	19%

We can make two brief observations here:

- 1) The preference of dealing with the events and their prehistory is striking, and we will see the same preoccupation with history when we discuss the time scale of the articles (see paragraph 2.6).
- 2) At first, it seems laudable that the press prefers a style of analytical depth and complexity. Yet, it is open to question whether that level of complexity is good for the readers and whether the readers would not be better served with less analysis but more facts and viewpoints.

2.4. Field: The media as the follower of the “official” agenda

The true nature of the coverage is revealed when we look at the various topics these items cover:

- 1) Probably the three of the most “unhuman” of all journalistic topics, “inter-governmental multilateral or bilateral relations and foreign policy” are the leading topics, with 33%, 10 % and 8% respectively.
- 2) Economic topics like “Industry & business” and “energy resources,” as well as “shadow economy, corruption,” “organized crime,” or “migration, refugees” are practically absent.
- 3) Also absent are any “human-interest” stories; only 2% of the items surveyed are under the topic “culture,” social issues are 3%, customs and traditions 0,2%.
- 4) A notable exception in “non-political” “non-diplomatic” coverage is “sports” which is almost 10% of all items surveyed. This is a direct result of the World Cup qualifying game of April 2009, and the “football diplomacy” that Turkey and Armenia initiated on this occasion.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Domestic political developments	17	3,8	3,8	3,8
	Political reforms	3	,7	,7	4,5
	Legislative amendments, decisions	3	,7	,7	5,2
	Human rights	7	1,6	1,6	6,8
	Elections	5	1,1	1,1	7,9
	Health	1	,2	,2	8,1
	Industry, business	1	,2	,2	8,4
	Energy resources, power generation	1	,2	,2	8,6
	Small and private entrepreneurship	1	,2	,2	8,8
	Social issues	13	2,9	2,9	11,8
	Social reforms	6	1,4	1,4	13,1
	Education	2	,5	,5	13,6
	Religion	1	,2	,2	13,8
	Customs and traditions	1	,2	,2	14,0
	media	14	3,2	3,2	17,2
	Sport	42	9,5	9,5	26,7
	Domestic political disturbances	14	3,2	3,2	29,9
	Terrorism	3	,7	,7	30,5
	Regional conflicts	3	,7	,7	31,2
	Regional cooperation	1	,2	,2	31,4
	Regional integration	2	,5	,5	31,9
	Inter-governmental bilateral relations	45	10,2	10,2	42,1
	Inter-governmental multilateral relation	145	32,8	32,8	74,9
	War	1	,2	,2	75,1
	International terrorism	1	,2	,2	75,3
	National security	5	1,1	1,1	76,5
	International cooperation	7	1,6	1,6	78,1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Foreign policy	34	7,7	7,7	85,7
	Culture	8	1,8	1,8	87,6
	Other	55	12,4	12,4	100,0
	Total	442	100,0	100,0	

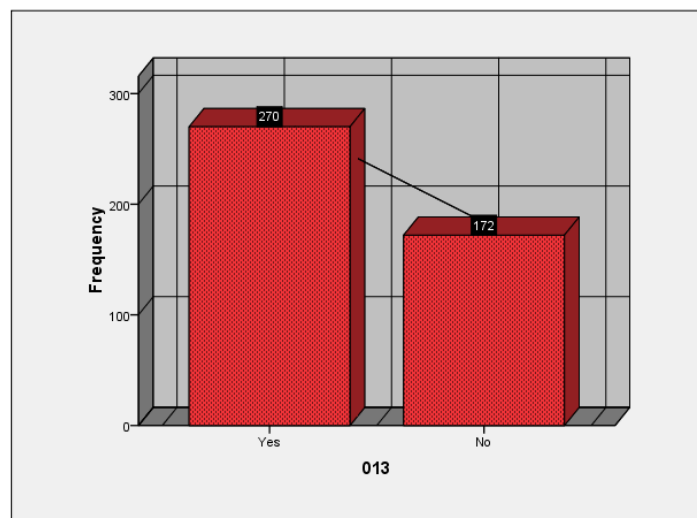
2.4.1. Politics & Politicians as main stimulants of the media

This situation is an indication that the media follows an “official” agenda covering the Armenian-Turkish relations. This situation becomes even clearer by another question: we asked at whether the writing of the items surveyed were stimulated by a political act or initiating communication. The result was an overwhelming Yes: 61 %. The three most common initiating acts were public speeches (11%) and announcements (%6) by official actors and meetings of political nature (8,6%).

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	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	270	61,1	61,1	61,1
No	172	38,9	38,9	100,0
Total	442	100,0	100,0	

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Expressions of public initiatives or civic events as the starting point of the media coverage are rare: Public discussions are the initiating acts of only 0,5% of the items surveyed, signature collections are 0,7%, authorized-unauthorized demonstration and rallies 2,5%, and “research conferences or academic meetings” 2,7%. Yet, one can easily assume that these might produce an alternative to the narrow, unproductive political debates that dominated the issue for so long.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1: Legislative proposal	15	3,4	3,4	3,4
2: Parliamentary voting	2	,5	,5	3,8
5: Resolution adoption	3	,7	,7	4,5
7: Elections	7	1,6	1,6	6,1
8: Court decision	3	,7	,7	6,8
9: Signing of an agreement	1	,2	,2	7,0
10: Staff/personnel related decision	1	,2	,2	7,2
12: Exile/deportation	1	,2	,2	7,5
15: Preparations for troops deployment/withdrawal	1	,2	,2	7,7
17: Initiation of a lawsuit	3	,7	,7	8,4
18: Lawsuit at the Constitutional Court	1	,2	,2	8,6
19: Announcement	28	6,3	6,3	14,9
20: Press release/press conference	11	2,5	2,5	17,4
21: Interview/media publication	10	2,3	2,3	19,7
22: Public speech	48	10,9	10,9	30,5
23: Public/open letter	7	1,6	1,6	32,1
24: Other publication	19	4,3	4,3	36,4
25: Questionnaire	1	,2	,2	36,7
27: Opening of an internet website	1	,2	,2	36,9
28: Political meeting	38	8,6	8,6	45,5
29: Party meeting	1	,2	,2	45,7
30: Parliamentary session	1	,2	,2	45,9
32: Research conference, other academic meeting	12	2,7	2,7	48,6
33: Public discussion	2	,5	,5	49,1
36: Signature collection	3	,7	,7	49,8
37: Demonstration/rally	5	1,1	1,1	50,9
38: Picket/boycott/strike/hunger	6	1,4	1,4	52,3
39: Unauthorized demonstration/rally, picket/boycott/strike	1	,2	,2	52,5

The politically driven official agenda also contradicts with the “self-expressed” demands of the audience. In our focus groups, when asked what they wanted to read in the papers and what they were missing most, almost all the participants wanted to read more about the people “on the other side” and what their feelings, thoughts and worries were.

2.5. Actors: The weight of “the triumvirate of the officialdom”

The actors of this politically driven, official agenda are, as to be expected, the politicians. The primary actor in the surveyed articles is, by a wide margin, The President: 30 %. Here we should caution on one detail, The President is a “composite” character, not only the Turkish President, but also his counterparts in Armenia, US and France are covered here.

The President is followed by The Prime Minister and the Government and other Ministers: they are the primary actors of almost 12,5 % of all articles in the survey. “Diplomats” as a collective identity are the third largest primary actor: 11%.

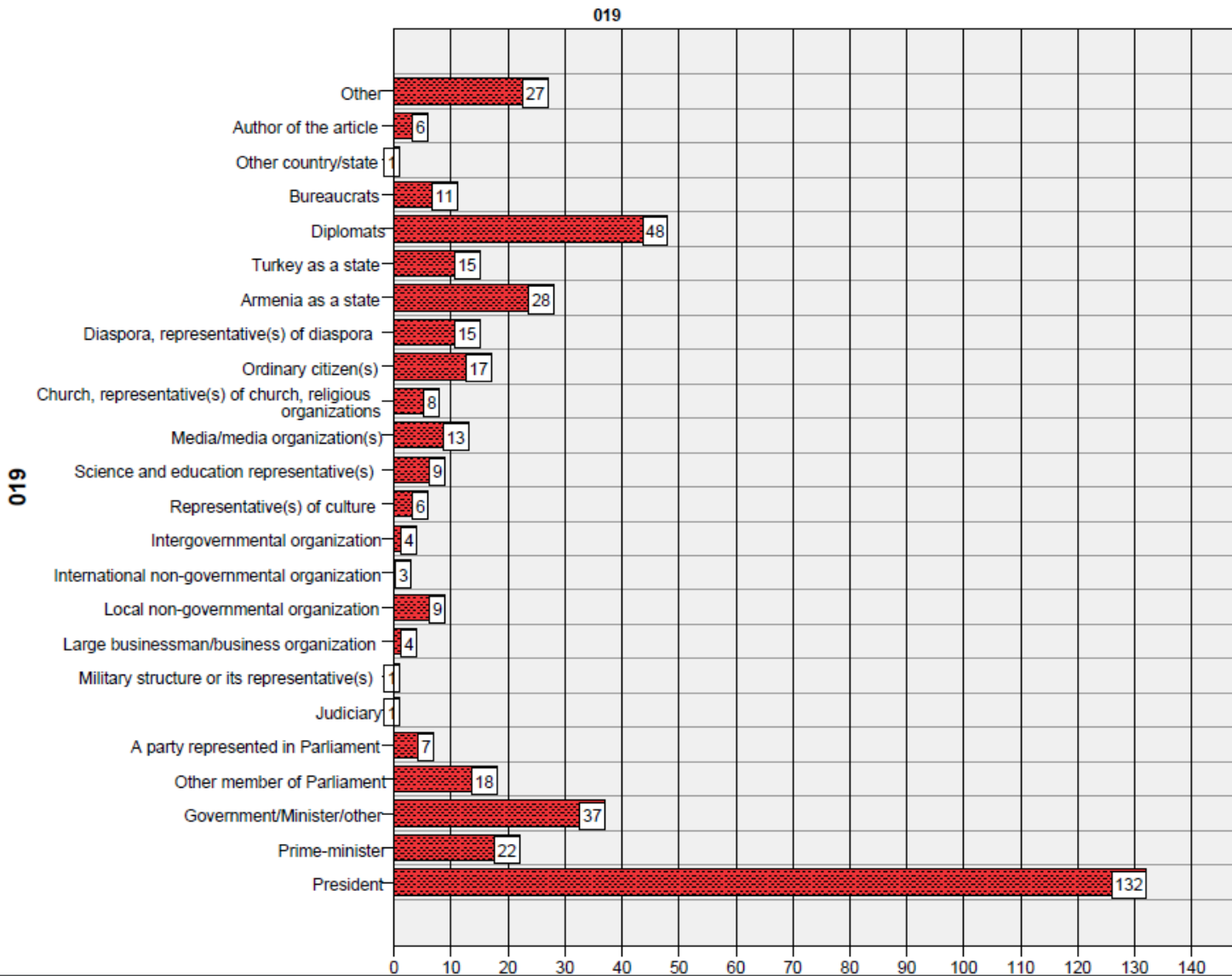
In total, what I would call “the triumvirate of the officialdom” (ie: The President, The Prime Minister and The Diplomat) dominates the survey as the primary actors in 53,5% of all the articles.

Far behind the politicians/diplomats are other primary actors: People from academia: 2%. Media and media organisations: 2,9%. Representatives of culture: 1,4%.

Two actors should be mentioned specifically:

- 1) The representatives of the Diaspora are the primary actors in 3,4% of all the articles in the survey. If one compares it with the weight the Diaspora occupies as a political factor in the minds of our focus group participants or in the public discourse in general, the figure appears very sensible.
- 2) The representatives of the religious organizations are the primary actors of almost 2% of the articles in the survey. In the Turkish media, this practically means the Armenian Patriarchy in Istanbul, and its spiritual leader, Patriarch Mesrob Mutafyan. Mutafyan became a powerful voice in the public debate for better relations between Armenia and Turkey. Unfortunately, he was incapacitated with a serious illness in the last two years and is practically absent from the public debate. Otherwise, the figure of 2% would definitely have been higher.

Last, but not least, is the famous “ordinary citizen” who is the primary actor in a mere 4% of all the articles surveyed. Thankfully he/she performs slightly better as a secondary actor. The “ordinary citizen” appears as a secondary or tertiary actor in 11,5% of all the articles.



2.6. The Geographical Scope: International beyond Doubt

The geographical references in the articles we surveyed reveal certain editorial tendencies:

Armenia & provinces	10,0 %
Turkey & provinces	11,5 %
Armenia and Turkey	7,0 %
Turkey and Azerbaijan	3,7 %
Turkey, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh	1,2 %
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey	2,9 %
Turkey and the US	8,4 %
Armenia, Turkey, the US	3,8 %
Turkey and European country/countries	7,5 %
Armenia, Turkey, European country/countries	2,3 %
Turkey and other country/countries of the world	14,0 %
Armenia, Turkey and other country /countries of the world	18,3 %

- 1) Despite all the rhetoric to the contrary, this is not a bi-lateral story for the Turkish media: Armenia and Turkey appear only in 7 % of all articles as common geographical references.
- 2) This is also not a regional story for the Turkish media: The weight of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh as a factor in the regional diplomacy is not reflected in the press coverage: Only 4% of all stories have Azerbaijan as a geographical reference. Nagorno Karabagh appears only in 4% of all stories.
- 3) The survey clearly reveals that this is a story with international dimensions for the Turkish media: Almost 33% of all the articles tell the story with a reference to “other countries of the world.” EU is a geographical reference in almost 10 % of the articles and USA in 12%.

2.7. Time Scale: Anchored in the past – Talking about the future

An interesting finding is the time limits of the items surveyed. We asked two questions: what is the period of the latest event mentioned in the article? And what is the earliest event. These two questions revealed three interesting findings:

- 1) As to be expected with a journalistic work, the period of the latest events was mostly yesterday or last week.
- 2) There is a strong tendency to talk about the future: some 44% of all items surveyed have some reference to the future.
- 3) Most importantly, when asked about the earliest event mentioned in the article, there is an overwhelming reference to the period of 1850-1917, i.e. the events of 1915. Some 40% of all the items surveyed mentions these events. Taken together with the references to the “last 17 years” (13%) which covers the independent Armenia and to the “Soviet times” (11%) which covers the period from late 20’s to 90’s, almost 65,5% of all items have at least one reference to the past events.

The period of the latest event mentioned in the article		The period of the earliest event mentioned in the article	
Yesterday	11%	Last 17 years with an independent Armenia	12,7%
Last week	13%	During the Soviet times, with Armenia as mainly diaspora	11 %
Future reference	44%	1850 - 1917	40%
Indefinable	25%	1849 and earlier	3,4

At the first glance this is to be expected. The events of 1915 are the formative issue around which the Armenian-Turkish relations have evolved and are still revolving. The activities of ASALA in 70’s and 80’s, and the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the following decade with all its human and diplomatic consequences are still resonating in the Turkish minds and hearts.

Yet the relations between Armenia and Turkey are also a matter for the present day. The two peoples are living next door and dealing with the problems of the present. Global issues of our times affect the two countries with equal ferocity. But the media talks about a period almost a century old. The fact that the daily media can not escape from the past is an indication that the discourse in Turkey on the Armenian-Turkish relations is still dominated by history.

2.8. Sourcing: Media Speaking to the Media

The sourcing of the stories in the survey reveals several issues. Almost one third of all the articles have only one source. Compared to the 5% that has no source at all, this seems to be much better. Still one would prefer that the very basic journalistic rule of double-checking a story with two or more sources should have been applied more vigorously: In our case, only 27% of the articles surveyed have two sources, and an additional 16% have three sources.

This seems to be pretty satisfactory when one consider the fact that sourcing and double-checking with independent sources has actually become a wide-spread problem in the news writing in general, and not only in Turkey.

As it is the case with the actors of the articles in the survey, the sources are mainly political in nature. The President, the prime minister and government ministers make up 35% of the primary sources.

	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid President	23,6	23,6
Prime-minister	4,3	28,0
Government/Minister/other	7,3	35,2
Other member of Parliament	3,0	38,2
A party represented in Parliament	,7	38,9
Military structure or its representative(s)	,2	39,1
Local self-government bodies	,5	39,5
Large businessman/business organization	1,8	41,4
Local non-governmental organization	1,4	42,7
International non-governmental organization	,9	43,6
Intergovernmental organization	2,3	45,9
Representative(s) of culture	1,4	47,3
Science and education representative(s)	3,2	50,5
Media/media organization(s)	8,4	58,9
Church, representative(s) of church, religious organizations	1,6	60,5
Ordinary citizen(s)	2,5	63,0
Diaspora, representative(s) of diaspora	,5	63,4
Armenia as a state	,2	63,6
Turkey as a state	,9	64,5
Diplomats	,7	65,2
Bureaucrats	,9	66,1
Other country/state	6,6	72,7
Author of the article	,2	73,0
Other	22,3	95,2
Source not mentioned	4,8	100,0
Total	100,0	

An interesting feature one can see in this table is the importance of the media as a source of the media. In 8% of the stories, the media is the primary source. Together with another 8% of the stories where the media is the secondary source, and yet another 5% where it is the tertiary source, the media appears as the second most quoted source, behind the politicians.

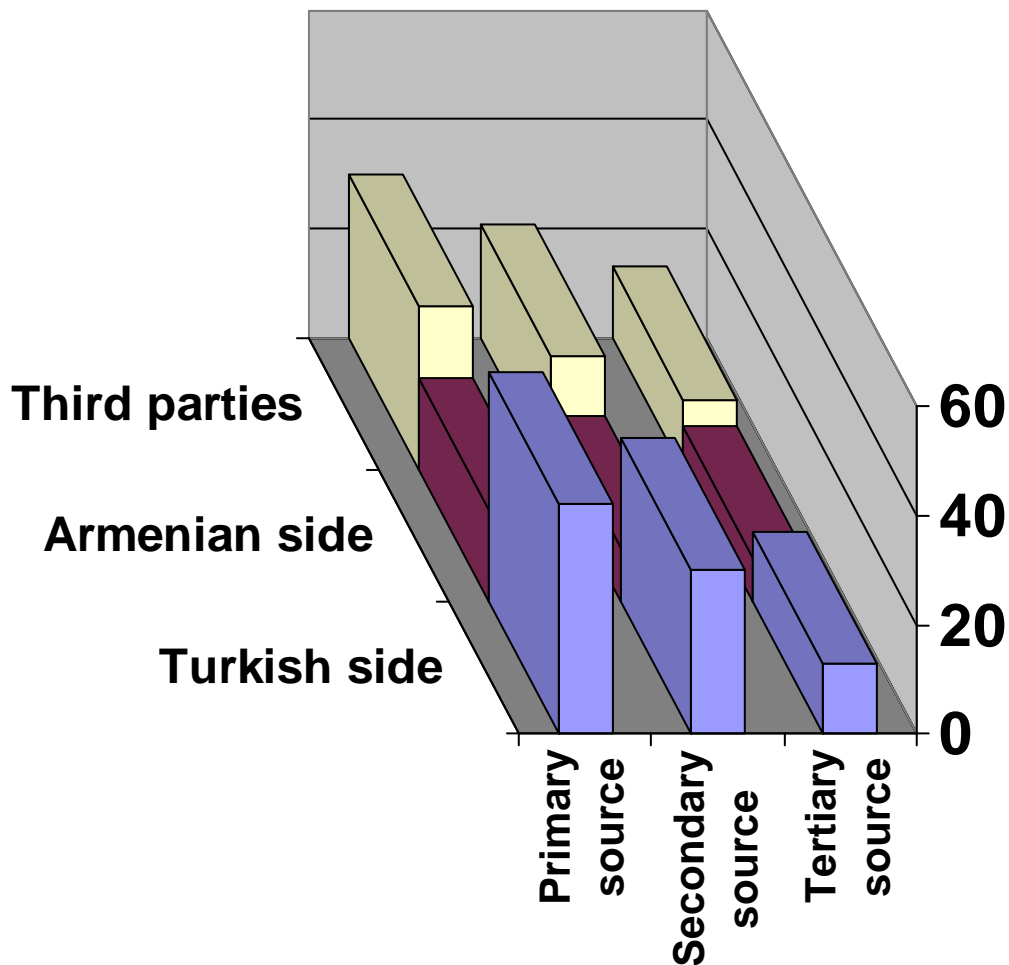
This situation of “the press quoting the press” should be considered a worrisome tendency. It might perpetuate whatever cliches and biases are already there in the media. It also means that the press is communicating views, opinions and even facts without going to the real sources themselves.

Another problem is revealed when the sources are analysed in terms of representation. The relations between Armenia and Turkey is an issue with two clearly identifiable sides, plus a number of third parties. All these parties have their own stories to tell, their viewpoints to explain. A careful balancing act in sourcing is necessary to make justice to the complexity of the issue. Yet, the survey shows that the press has a long way to go to reach this goal.

The primary source in 42% of the articles survey are representing the Turkish side. The third parties are the primary source in 30% of the articles. And the Armenian side is represented as the primary source only in the 17% of the articles.

One could assume that the Turkish press would prefer the Turkish side as the primary source and balance the story with the views of the secondary and/or tertiary sources. Even that assumption proves wrong: The Turkish side is the secondary source in 30% of the articles, third parties are in 21%. The Armenian side is a secondary source only in 10% of the articles.

The situation does not change with the tertiary sources: The Armenian side is a tertiary source in only 8% of the articles, whereas the Turkish side and the third parties are in 13% each.



This is clearly a problem: In a typical case of “preaching to the converted” the Turkish press is over-representing the Turkish view to the Turkish readers. The Armenian view is seriously disadvantaged, if not completely excluded.

The situation is not very different when the extents of the viewpoints expressed in the articles are analyzed.

Most of the articles express one or two viewpoints, 28 % for each.

Only 17% of the articles expressed three viewpoints and 14% four or more.

Yet, when the articles are analyzed in terms of the origins of the viewpoints, one result is striking: 67% of the articles have no Armenian viewpoint, i.e. they are “mute” when it comes to communicate the views, opinions, emotions of the Armenian side. And of the remaining 33%, great parts (24%) contain only one viewpoint.

By contrast, the Turkish viewpoints are much better communicated: 74% of all articles have some viewpoints expressed in them. 42 % have only one viewpoint, 20% have two, and 10% have three, four or more viewpoints.

3.Conclusion

The survey of some 450 articles spanning a period from April 2006 to April 2009 and dealing with Armenian-Turkish relations and Armenia reveals a number of tendencies in the Turkish press.

- 1) The press follows closely a political/official agenda, at the origin of most of the stories one finds a political act, announcement, etc.
- 2) The main actors and sources are politicians and officials. The main subject the stories cover are of political or diplomatic nature.
- 3) Human-interest stories, as well as, non-political actors or sources are noticeably absent.
- 4) The stories are told in a one-sided fashion. Armenian sources and viewpoints reflecting the Armenian side are under-represented.
- 5) This is clearly an international issue with multi-lateral dimensions for the press. Countries other than Turkey and Armenia have an important place in the coverage. By contrast, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabagh receive less coverage.
- 6) There is almost a fascination with the prehistory of the issue in the press, as well as in the minds of the readers. Most of the stories contain a reference to the distant past, i.e. the events of 1915.

With all these in mind there is one more observation to make:

The survey is a content-analysis, the discourse of the articles are not analysed. Yet, after reviewing the entire 450 stories one reaches the impression of a radical change in the Turkish press.

The headlines, clichés and expression that represented a general anti-Armenian bias in the Turkish media have mostly disappeared from the mainstream press.

This is also the preliminary finding of the “hate-speech” project that the International Hrant Dink Foundation is undertaking.

Yet these “archaic” practices survive in marginal papers: There are still headlines that attack and target people working for reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey. Certain clichés about Armenians are freely used. The identification of the Armenians and the Kurds as two ethnic “enemies” of Turks and the Turkish state is still well-alive in these publications.

The more serious problem is somewhere else. What merely survives in marginal papers with some thousands of circulation, literally flourish in the cyber-world of the internet. Social networks like Facebook and various mail groups, some created and operated by the best educated segments of the population, are rife with irrational speculation, conspiracy theories and hate. They are widely circulated, and novel additions spread out like wild fires. Yet they go mostly unnoticed by outsiders. This parallel universe with its shadowy actors should be the subject of further surveys.