

## PAPER DETAILS

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## **THE REPRESENTATION OF THE TURKISH ARMED FORCES IN THE PRESS DURING TURKEY'S EU MEMBERSHIP PROCESS: The Case of the 2 November 2004 Press Briefing**

**Nuran YILDIZ\***

### **Abstract**

*The relationship of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) to the society and the implications of this relationship for the political sphere have a special meaning to the national and international media. The observers interested in the level of democratization under the EU membership process follow closely both the statements of the TAF and their representation in the media. The interest in the TAF's communication with the public flows from two sources: First, how the TAF, the self-declared founder and guardian of the nation state, will position itself in Turkey's EU membership process draws attention to its public declarations because this process involves substantial transformation of sovereignty in numerous areas. Second, the reaction of the TAF to the EU's demands on the reorganization of civil military relations puts the TAF in a delicate position, for the reforms have forced it to relinquish its hold over power.*

*To gain a grasp of the way the Turkish media represents the TAF's statements in this process, this paper studies a crucial case by employing "macro structural discourse analysis," i.e., the press briefing organized by the TAF on November 2, 2004, which is the only press briefing in the process leading to the EU's decision to launch accession talks with Turkey. The analysis here is based on two assumptions. First, the TAF organizes press briefings to convey its message to the public as part of its institutional communication practices. The coverage of those briefings by various media outlets is shaped by the publication policies as well as their relationship to the capital. Second, despite this variation across newspapers, all media institutions consider the TAF's attitude in this process as a crucial variable. The findings of the study lend empirical support to both assumptions.*

**Key Words:** *Army, soldier, media, institutional communication, European Union, news*

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### Özet

*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nin (TSK) toplumla ilişkisi ve bu ilişkinin siyasal alana etkileri ulusal ve uluslararası kitle iletişim araçları için özel bir anlama sahiptir. Bu nedenle Türkiye'nin AB üyelik sürecinde demokratikleşmesiyle ilgilenen gözlemciler için TSK'nın açıklamaları ve bu açıklamaların medyada temsilini yakından izlemektedirler.*

*Bu çalışma, üyelik sürecinde TSK açıklamalarının Türk medyasında temsilinin taşıdığı anlamı ortaya koymak için Türkiye ile müzakerelerin başlaması sürecinde, TSK tarafından 2 Kasım 2004'te gerçekleştirilen tek basın brifinginin "macro yapısal söylem çözümlemesi" yöntemi kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Bu çözümleme iki varsayım içermektedir. İlki, TSK, basın brifinglerini, kurumsal iletişiminin bir parçası olarak mesajlarını halka ulaştırmak için düzenler. Medyada yer alan bu brifinglerin kapsamı sermaye ilişkileri kadar medya politikaları tarafından belirlenir. İkincisi, gazeteler arasındaki farklara rağmen bütün medya kurumları bu süreçte TSK'nın tavrını önemli bir değişken olarak düşünür. Çalışmanın bulguları her iki varsayımı da desteklemektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ordu, asker, medya, kurumsal iletişim, Avrupa Birliği, haber.

### Introduction

The organizations that need the approval and backing of the public for legitimacy purposes long have recognized the importance of communication management. This "need for approval" is especially reflected in the management of national and international communication by political organizations. In a country such as Turkey where the military continues to exert a significant direct and indirect influence over the political decision-making mechanism, unlike the pattern of civil-military relations found in many Western democracies, the communication between the military and the public through the medium of the press gains a particularly unique meaning and is of particular interest to scholars studying the subject.

As far as the specific case of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) is concerned, given the vast formal and informal competences it possesses in domestic politics and the impact of its input on the actual policy outcomes, one has to analyze not only the content of the statements issued by the TAF, but also how the media frames them. For those interested in communication management, as a result, it is intriguing to analyze the approach that the Turkish media, the most significant medium of communication between the TAF and the public, adopts in covering the news pertaining to the TAF as the question has both academic and policy relevance. With the recent wave of domestic reforms induced by the country's accession process into the EU, Turkey's existing model of civil-military relationship came under spotlight. As part of the democratization package, intended to clear the way for Turkey's eventual joining into the EU, the role of the military in civilian politics is curbed significantly to which the TAF did not oppose, surprising many domestic and international observers. How the TAF's position during

the EU process is presented in the media offers a crucial case to understand the coverage of the military-related news in Turkey. This study looks at two interrelated aspects of this issue: The empirical analysis concerns the way in which the media frames the TAF's statements during Turkey's EU membership process. Second, the TAF's organizational communicational capabilities is introduced briefly to complement the analysis of the media's position, for the differences in institutional communication techniques are likely to affect the coverage of an institution's statements.

It is difficult to gain insight into the working of the TAF's communicational capabilities given that it is not transparent. This lack of outside access to its inner organization of communication sometimes leads to contradictory remarks on the TAF: whereas it is accused of not making a statement on one issue, it is criticized for declaring its position on other topics. Actually, the clues to why Turkey is so sensitive to the issue of the Turkish military's communication can be found in the following remark: "a civilian Turk thinks whatever a military Turk thinks."<sup>1</sup> In other words, because the Turkish military is closely embedded in the society, it always has played an important role in shaping the public opinion.

The strong bond between the Turkish Army and Turkish civilians stems from three interrelated factors: First, even from the beginning of the Ottoman Empire era, the military has become almost identical with the state. Second is the belief that from the beginning of the reform movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century toward the end of the Ottoman Empire, military officers have become the pioneers in borrowing Western techniques and new ideas. And finally, from the first years of Atatürk's Republic in the 1920s, the military inherited a new tradition of remaining in its barracks but interfering with politics when the state faces an existential threat.<sup>2</sup>

The TAF, which has strong links with the society, avails itself of diverse and complicated means of institutional communication. Those means of communication comprise a wide array of activities varying from continual and regular provision of humanitarian aid to the underdeveloped regions of the country to issuing of written/oral statements regarding the issues on the agenda of the country. The press briefings organized by the TAF to communicate its position on various issues are only one of the several institutional communication methods.

### **Media and News**

If communication is understood as 'the transmission of meaning,' the media becomes the most important medium in the communication process. The transmission of meaning can be viewed as an effort to achieve a goal by backing up created images with audio and visual means, which takes place in an ideological context defined by agreed upon reference points. As is emphasized in the discussions on the content of the media, seen from an ideological perspective, "ideas are related to the power and self-

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<sup>1</sup> H. Goktas, M. Gulbay, *Kısladan Anayasaya Ordu*, Istanbul, Metis Yayinlari, 2004, p.11.

<sup>2</sup> W. Hale, *Türkiye'de Ordu Ve Siyaset*, Istanbul, Hil Yayinlari, 1996, p.14.

interest, and the power of creating symbols is far from being neutral.”<sup>3</sup> In that regard, one could interpret most interferences with the news process as being expressions of certain ideological points of view.

The content of the news not only creates and materializes the relationship between the social structure and power but also helps ensure its continuity. The import of the information meetings studied in this paper lies in the fact that they are delivered by one of the most important wielders of social power in the country, the Turkish Armed Forces. The main concern of this case study is to analyze how the media covered the relationship between the main actors of power - the army and the civilian government- during the EU membership process. Studying this process is important because it significantly altered the parameters of the very relations of power among key institutions in the country. The place where the media positions itself in this power relationship, and the bias it shows in producing news (which may be embedded in the choice of news items, as much as in the way these items are served and rank ordered) are also important.

#### **The Communication of the Military as an Institution**

The concepts of ‘strategy’ and ‘tactic’ are originated from military affairs. Although they conventionally had been used mainly in strategic studies and diplomatic history, they were introduced into communication studies during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the management of institutional and personal communication, organizations started developing their own strategies and tactics. An army which excels in controlling information both in the area of communications, and in the area of military strategy obviously will not be approved by the entire society unconditionally. It will however certainly possess an optimum communications system to convey its message to its target population.

The evolution of democratic regimes on the one hand and the transformation that armed forces have gone through in order to adapt themselves to new social norms and customs on the other have compelled the armed forces to take notice of the messages coming from their respective societies. In today’s world, the trust that people feel toward the military does not arise from the wars armies win but is produced in the minds of the people. In other words, military battle grounds are no longer the land, the sea and the sky but human mind. Not only political and commercial organizations but also military organizations are engaged in a fierce battle to shape the human mind to transmit their version of truth. An example of numerous cases where armed forces have incorporated the public into their information management approaches is the regular press information meetings organized by the TAF. Another example is provided by the Pentagon’s decision to reorganize the Strategic Communication Center - which was established after the September 11 attacks- because it lost its reliability in the eyes of the society.

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<sup>3</sup> P. Shoemaker, S.D. Reese, “Ideolojinin Medya Icerigi Uzerindeki Etkisi”, In S. Irvan (ed.). **Medya Kultur Siyaset**, Ankara, Ark Yayinlari, 2003, p.102.

A broad consensus exists among observers that the relationship between the military and the civilians is hardly clear-cut. According to Nadir Devlet, one of the advocates of that view, the military holds such a position in Turkey that whenever civilians face a threat they turn to the military for help: "Whenever there is an earthquake: the military, whenever there is a fire: the military, whenever there is a disaster: the military... because the military has a well organized infrastructure already in place. In some situations, civilians are not capable of looking after themselves."<sup>4</sup>

From the foundation of the Turkish Republic on, the TAF has defined itself based on such values as struggle, achievement, and success and on countering threats to national security externally and internally. The institutional identity of the TAF today has two specific characteristics: it is seen as both a force of 'discipline' and a force of 'peace.' 'Reliability' also can be considered as a characteristic of the TAF's institutional image, if not institutional identity. The TAF usually ranks among the top two in the polls taken to ascertain the most reliable institutions. As a matter of fact, in the same polls generally the government, parliament and the media rank below the TAF.

Although the army has carried out three military coups, according to Serdar Sen, the reason why the Turkish society has so much faith in the military is because the army is considered as "the representative of those [values] which need to be protected."<sup>5</sup> The military once "taught how to read and write to those who couldn't", and then introduced many of them for the first time to jobs other than agricultural jobs. "The people view the military as a father figure, a traditional father figure to be more exact. A father who protects his children, teaches them new things and punishes them if necessary" says Sen<sup>6</sup>. Obviously, this situation creates a positive image about the military in the eyes of the people.

The support of a large segment of the Turkish people to the military coups is an important indicator of the trust the society fostered for the armed forces in Turkey. The military's consistent attempt to return the country back to a democratic regime after each coup further strengthened the trust of the people. Those practices consolidate the military's image as the "defender of regime" in people's minds. The fact that after the two coups (1960, 1980) executed by the Turkish Armed Forces "in order to preserve social stability" soldiers returned to their barracks and reinstituted the parliamentary system is an important feature of the *sui generis* civil-military relationship that exist in Turkey. That the TAF is a defender of social stability is shown as an example to other countries from time to time. A similar example came from a columnist from *The Washington Post*, Jackson Diehl (2005, March, 14) who stated that "Respect for the constitution can be enforced by regional accords, as in Latin America, or by a national army, as in Turkey."

Journalist-writer Mehmet Ali Kışlalı, after noting that the Turks hold the TAF at a high esteem, points out that "therefore the society pays close attention to statements

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<sup>4</sup> H. Goktas, M. Gulbay, *Kışladan Anayasaya Ordu*, p.154.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.102.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

coming from the Armed Forces.”<sup>7</sup> In a situation where the society pays attention to statements of military figures out of respect rather than fear from dictators, we can obtain an extremely important clue regarding the pattern of institutional communication that exist in an organization: the credibility the TAF enjoys in the eyes of the people plays an important role in facilitating its communication with the society.

### **Turkish Armed Forces’ Communication Framework**

The relation between mass communication means and the military is usually a problematical one. In Turkey, especially during coups, mass communication institutions lean toward the military in their reporting. During other periods, the media is criticized for presenting the military usually as an opponent to democracy, or for being vague and not taking a clear position in the struggle between the civilian authority and armed forces.<sup>8</sup> When evaluated against the backdrop of the lack of confidence in communication media, this problematic relationship manifests itself in the relationship between the capital and the media.

As a consequence of declarations made by the TAF in the context of the military coups, according to people who criticize the military, soldiers frequently interfere with politics by speaking too much about an issue. They also contend that partly because of this situation the military suffers from lack of effective means of communication in its relations with the civilians. Umit Ozdag , who thinks that this lack of communication causes several problems, claims that “in order to overcome this situation, first of all the TAF should recognize that it needs to explain itself to its nation in today’s world (...) In the new millennium, because everybody around the globe including the Turks are exposed to not only information but also disinformation at a massive scale, the Armed Forces needs to develop proper mechanisms to express itself to its nation just as other institutions do.”<sup>9</sup> In recent years, in an attempt to develop such proper mechanisms, under coordination of the Communications Department of the Chief of Staff’s General Secretariat the Turkish military is running a web site which is updated continuously, and where press briefings are also published. Both means have come to establish themselves as the most important and official source of information for the mass media on military issues.

Military declarations in the mass media can be divided into two categories, namely written and verbal declarations. Written declarations generally are dispatched to the media to inform the public, and their main purpose is to respond to or clarify controversial issues on the agenda of public discussion. From time to time, messages celebrating special days (religious holidays, new year’s eve, etc.) are signed by the Chief of General Staff and published in written form. Verbal declarations may take two forms: official and non-official declarations. Official ones are delivered by those who are charged to speak in the name of the institution. Official declarations include press

<sup>7</sup> H. Goktas, M. Gulbay, *Kısladan Anayasaya Ordu*, p.181.

<sup>8</sup> I. Neziroglu, *Türkiye’de Askeri Müdahaleler Ve Basın*, Ankara, Türk Demokrasi Vakfı Yayınları, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> H. Goktas, M. Gulbay, *Kısladan Anayasaya Ordu*, p.164.

(information) meetings, briefings to targeted audiences, and ceremonial declarations (symposium and congress speeches, degree ceremony speeches, etc.). Non-official declarations are usually spontaneous public speeches given by the top brass of the TAF at various receptions, in meeting halls, or cocktails etc. In this study, an important form of the TAF's official declarations, press briefings, are taken into consideration.

### **Press Briefings**

In the past the Turkish Armed Forces briefed the press mainly when it deemed an issue as vital and involving itself, and it did so only when those issues started to occupy a considerable place on the public agenda. Since 2004, however, it has started to hold press briefings more often and on a regular basis. Three officials have the authority to make declarations in the name of the armed forces at these meetings: the Chief of the General Staff, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff and the Secretary- General of the Armed Forces. The Ankara representatives and defense correspondents of mass communication outlets and news agencies are invited to these meetings, which are said to have been initiated to respond to the criticisms that the military was not transparent and isolated itself from the public scrutiny. The meetings also were intended to put an end to the Turkish media's usual habit of producing speculative news concerning the position of the military on public discussions, often by referring to 'an unidentified military officer' as the source of news reporting.

The most important dimension of press information meetings is that they provide a platform for face to face communication between soldiers and journalists. Invited journalists can ask any question to the speaker of the Office of the General Staff. The only criterion that is asking question, journalists are expected to remain within the limits of politeness, and avoid making prejudgments or accusations targeting specific people. The speakers generally answer all questions and rarely do they refuse to reply. On January 26, 2005, the way press briefings works was presented to the public through a live press information meeting, which was broadcasted for 96 minutes on national TV channels -four major channels aired the whole briefing including the Q&A.

As is widely discussed in communication studies, not only the content of the speech and the question-answer part, but also the presentation of this content in the media are of considerable importance. The media's representation of the news on the subject presents an important case to study how it positions itself in this relationship of power.

### **The EU and Turkey**

Since the foundation of modern Turkey, Turkey's official policy was based on integrating with the Western world in geographically, politically, and culturally. In both public and political life Turkish elites have implemented several reforms to this end. Becoming part of the economic and political union of European countries under the framework of the European Union has become the boldest manifestation of the Turkish state elites' goal of Westernization starting. Turkey's European Union membership vocation, which has been ongoing since the 1963 Ankara Agreement, has been characterized by ups and down during the past few years. The recommendation of the



European Union Commission in its report on Turkey's progress toward membership dated October 6, 2004 that Turkey had fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria, and the European Union could open accession negotiations with Turkey raised expectations in the country about getting an initiation date for the negotiations with the EU. Eventually at the European Council meeting held on December 17, 2004 the European leaders decided to start the accession talks with Turkey on October 3, 2005.

In the run up to the 17 December, 2004 EU Council meeting, national and international attention was focused on the TAF; this attention and curiosity originated from a number of reasons. First of all, questions were abound as to whether the TAF, the founder and defender of the nation-state, really wanted Turkey's European Union membership. The Armed Forces officials put an halt to this discussion through a statement in which they maintained that the EU is the most relevant tool for raising Turkey "beyond the limits of contemporary civilization, the goal designated by Atatürk."

The international interest in the TAF, especially within some circles in Europe that are against Turkey's membership, arose from a curiosity about whether the TAF would issue a declaration, which could be interpreted as a proof for its interference in civilian politics. After the announcement of the 6 October report, international observers expected a declaration (in fact, reaction) from the TAF on the Commission's recommendations regarding enhancing the civilian control over the military in Turkey (in particular rearranging the TAF's inner organization, making it accountable to the Ministry of Defence rather than the Office of the Prime Minister). Another source of curiosity resulted from the strong dilemma the EU leaders faced in their approach toward the TAF. Although the EU was critical of the TAF's influence over civilian politics, it at the same time wanted Turkey's membership largely because the EU would have access to the TAF's military strength and operational capabilities. On several occasions, EU figures stated frankly that the EU would need "the TAF in the struggle against terrorism" or "to make up for the EU's own shortcomings in order to become a global power." For instance, John Richardson, the EU Commission's Representative at the United Nations, stated during a speech he delivered in New York that the EU wanted to become a force that could yield great global influence for which Turkey's position and military power were crucial. In spite of the significance of Turkey's military power for the EU, the leaders of some EU member states were worried that the TAF constituted a major obstacle to the democratization process.

An analysis of the concentration of great interest in the TAF during a critical juncture in the restructuring of political system in the country is likely to offer important data for researchers interested in understanding the Turkish media's attitude toward the power relationship in the Turkish political system. Given that the TAF traditionally had been defined as the founder and defender of the nation-state and the values that come with it, Turkey's integration to the EU, which involves substantial transfer of power and sovereignty to a supranational organization in a way to restructure the preexisting relations in the country would invite the skepticism of the military. By studying how different media institutions framed a critical statement of the TAF, we could gain

valuable insight into how the media positions itself as a reflection of its ideological orientation and relationship to the capital.

### **The Importance of the Study**

The case under consideration deserves scholarly attention for at least two major reasons: First, although the influence of the military in civilian politics is inarguably high, the number of scientific studies on the (TAF) are relatively low. The scant work on the TAF is mostly limited to periods of military coups. Apart from the analysis of socio political developments leading to the coups or examination of the memoirs of retired military officers, no significant studies exist that look at various dimensions of this important subject. This study is the first of its kind which analyzes the public relations of the military as an institution and the representation of this communication in the media. Second, this study is also important because statements made or briefings given by military institutions have an effect on political decisions in almost any country.

Barnett, a defense strategist working for the Pentagon and the White House, stated at a briefing given to the US Navy that "Correct briefings can change history."<sup>10</sup>

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Given the importance of the subject matter, this paper, which is designed as a case study, asserts two propositions. First, the TAF organizes press briefings to convey its message to the public as part of its institutional communication practices. It is forced to share its position on "delicate" and "national" matters with the public through the mass media in order to establish its own control over its institutional communication in order to avoid being criticized during the EU process and to minimize the image of being too meddlesome into politics through speculative news, hence prevent the TAF being drawn into politics. Second, the mass media transmits the TAF's attitude toward the EU process to the public after evaluating it from its own point of view which is shaped by different media outlets' ideological orientation and socioeconomic relations that surround them. Despite this variation across newspapers, however, all media institutions consider the TAF's attitude in this process as a crucial variable.

### **Method**

The case study focuses on statements made by the TAF between the declaration of the recommendation report published on October 6, 2004 and December 17, 2004, the day when the date for the start of negotiations was announced. The study analyzes in depth the one and only statement made by the TAF between these dates, i.e., on November 2, 2004, and the media commentaries made during the following week on the TAF's statement. In so doing, the method of "macro structural discourse analysis" is applied to the news in the Turkish press. "Discourse analysis is a method which tries to uncover the structures existing in the language of the text, thus investigate how the social power is constructed."<sup>11</sup> In discourse analysis, the context is essential: the news is

<sup>10</sup> Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map*, New York, Putnam Pub., 2004, p.66.

<sup>11</sup> S. Irvan, "Metin Cozumlemelerinde Yontem Sorunu", In *Medya Ve Kultur*, Ankara: 1. Ulusal Sempozyumu Bildirileri, 2000, p.81.

a product of the society in which it is born. In other words, its source is not the text *per se*, but the social structure. Because of this, the method of establishing the meaning through a discourse analysis looks at the relationship between language and context where the meaning is materialized. In this study, we look primarily at the title, subtitle, spot and the introduction sentences, which make up the macro structural characteristics of news stories. In assessing the data, the thematic structure (the context of news) is also evaluated.

The study is carried out in four steps:

First Step:

Since the subject matter of the study is a single occasion (i.e., the TAF statement, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the representation of the military's position, the study will look at numerous newspapers. For purposes of the study, *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Vatan*, *Milliyet*, and *Zaman* are selected as examples of widely circulating newspapers reaching various segments of the society whereas *Cumhuriyet*, *Yeni Safak*, *Radikal*, *Vakit*, and *Ortadogu* are chosen to represent newspapers that identify themselves closely with a narrower ideological position and have not achieved high sales numbers: close to the official Kemalist ideology, close to the governing party, following an intellectual point of view, advocating an Islamic position, and supporting a nationalist perspective, respectively. To make a comparison between newspapers' attitudes towards the TAF in previous cases and in the current case under consideration, when necessary, past issues of the newspapers corresponding to previous press briefings are also included into analysis.

Second Step:

The editions of the newspapers published during the week following November 3, 2004 are collected and classified as the first page news, continuing pages, and opinion columns.

Third Step:

Important themes from the press briefing on 2 November 2004 are selected from the text obtained from [www.tsk.mil.tr](http://www.tsk.mil.tr). These messages were arranged in the order of appearance in the original text and are tabulated in Table 1.

The basic messages underlined and their codes are as follows:

**Table 1: Message Codes\***

| <b>Code</b> | <b>Message</b>   |
|-------------|--|
| 1           | "The information regarding Turkey's intense activities in the Aegean air corridor and Kardak area is not accurate"   |
| 2           | "The January 2005 elections in Iraq, the information about the status of the coalition forces in Iraq, and the developments regarding Kirkuk's demographic structure have been evaluated."                 |
| 3           | "Any attempt to open Turkey's unitary state structure into debate can never be approved of by the TAF."  |
| 4           | "Quoting from Atatürk: 'The people of Turkey who founded the Turkish Republic are called Turks'"   |
| 5           | "We welcome the EU Commission's Recommendation Report acknowledging Turkey's fulfillment of the Copenhagen Criteria and recommending the start of membership negotiations."                                |
| 6           | "We do not approve of the statements referring to some individuals, who do not consider themselves as such, as minorities, and we are very concerned about such efforts."                                  |
| 7           | "If an attempt is made to translate civil rights given in the cultural fields into the political arena, it can cause polarization and dissolution. This situation closely concerns the national security." |
| 8           | "A unitary state either exists or not. There is no middle point."  |
| 9           | "The TAF's continued efforts to inform the press and the public are consistent with the principles of informing the public and of sharing information, which are also advocated by the EU."                |
| 10          | "It is worthwhile to note that regulations similar to the article 35 of the TAF's bylaw exist in almost every country."  |
| 11          | "The media should handle with care this kind of news about any institution, and try to refrain from behavior that can harm individuals' honor or reputation."  |
| 12          | "Neither shortening the military service period, nor announcing paid limited exemption is on our agenda."  |

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\* The message codes provided here are developed to easily identify and evaluate how and how often the themes in the TAF's briefing are used in the newspaper articles. To ensure the consistency, the same codes are used to refer to the same themes throughout the paper.

#### Fourth Step:

Statements from the headings, the news contents, and the columns containing these important themes from the TAF's text were tabulated, which constituted the basis of the analysis.

#### The Findings of the Study

The press briefing was given by the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Ilker Basbug. Reporters and representatives from accredited press institutions were invited to the briefing. Some newspapers such as *Zaman*, *Yeni Safak* and *Vakit* which are covered in this study were not invited to the press briefing as they were not accredited.

The TAF briefing text starts with information regarding the flights that constituted the basis of the Aegean crisis between Greece and Turkey, and assessments regarding the Kirkuk issue, and ends with the remarks on the news that had appeared in the Turkish media concerning the TAF, and on the duration of the obligatory military service. One-third of the text concerns these themes that directly concern the TAF, whereas the other two-thirds are dedicated to the EU Commission's report, especially its chapters on the "minorities". The text starts with an introduction saying that the Turkish Armed Forces wishes to share with the public its views on those subjects which fall in its area of responsibility and directly concern the TAF, and it will approach them from the national security angle. At the end of the text are printed Ataturk's words, "the people of Turkey who founded the Turkish Republic are called Turks" on a map of Turkey in Ataturk's own handwriting.

The most important 12 message sentences of the speech text presented in Table 1 summarize the whole of the speech. The first two about the Aegean and Kirkuk issues (codes 1 and 2) and the last two concerning the media and paid military service (codes 11 and 12) are related to institutional information. 6 out of the remaining 8 sentences (codes 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) include the assessments regarding the 'minority' issues which are mentioned in the EU reports whereas the last two sentences (codes 9 and 10) are responses to the TAF related observations included in the same EU report.

The evaluation is done by tabulating the data for each newspaper separately. Following this methodology, the following tables and data for each newspaper are obtained:

#### *Hürriyet*

*Hürriyet*, which is the widest circulating daily (except for *Posta* which is considered a tabloid newspaper), is owned by a big holding company that follows a liberal publication policy and controls the largest number of media institutions. Although it belongs to a big media group, given that the newspaper has a long history and a name for itself, in some cases this image may constrain it from acting as a typical holding paper. This is what differentiates it from, for instance, *Sabah* in some cases. Moreover, it pays special attention to maintaining a balanced policy toward different institutions; as a result, *Hürriyet* often seeks to avoid confrontation with the government and state institutions (such as the TAF, etc.). Except for the themes concerning the

Kirkuk issue and the information related to institutional matters (codes 11 and 12), *Hürriyet* published the whole of the speech text.

**Table 2: *Hürriyet***

| Page                  | 1 and inner pages  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Title                 | 'We won't back away from Lausanne'   |
| Subtitle              | 'Will disintegrate the country'  |
| Spot                  | The Military reacts to 'minority' in the report  |
| Introduction sentence | At the press briefing yesterday, the Deputy Chief of Staff Gen. İlker Basbug explained the TAF's position on the EU Progress Report and criticized it. |
| Text/Message          | 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10  |
| Photo                 | 3 photos of Gen. İlker Basbug  |
| Column (date/title)   | November 7, 'Strange silence of the government'  |
|                       | November 8, 'Statesmanlike leadership is needed on bumpy roads'  |
|                       | November 8, 'Media has fulfilled its responsibility'   |

The *Hürriyet* daily chose to highlight the "minority" issue with a loaded title: "We won't back away from Lausanne." It used the spot, 'Reaction by the Military,' and in its introduction of the news, it stated that the military 'criticized' the report. The story quoted the relevant sections of the TAF briefing text in its entirety. Another interesting point worth mentioning is that two out of three columns about the report emphasized that it was in fact the silence of the government on the issue that prompted the military to voice its opinion through a press briefing. The columnists also claimed that the public was informed about the issue only after this statement by the TAF. These columnists argued that the statements by the military in fact helped eliminate the information gap; as such they criticized the government indirectly.

### ***Sabah***

As far as a liberal publication policy goes, the *Sabah* daily emerges the main rival of *Hürriyet*. Like *Hürriyet*, *Sabah* is also owned by a holding company. As a matter of fact, during the period under consideration in this case study, it openly supported the AKP government. Behind this unequivocal support lies the fact that holding companies want to benefit from positive discrimination in government contracts. The implications of this concern can be seen clearly in *Sabah*'s news analysis. The title, subtitle, spot and introduction sentence of the news were devoted to Kirkuk; *Sabah* maintained that the fact that the government did not have any 'secret' plan about the issue was also confirmed by the military.

**Table 3: Sabah**

| Page                  | 1 and inner pages  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Title                 | ‘There is no Kirkuk plan’  |
| Subtitle              | ‘The preference of the General Staff is not weapons but diplomacy’   |
| Spot                  | The Deputy Chief of Staff Gen. İlker Basbug denied the allegations that an agreement over Kirkuk was reached with the USA  |
| Introduction sentence | The Deputy Chief of Staff Gen. İlker Basbug warned that any effort by the Iraqi Kurds to shape the future of Kirkuk to their own benefit could lead to a civil war |
| Text/Message          | 2, 3   |
| Photo                 | A photo showing Gen. Basbug’s left palm  |
| Column (date/title)   | November 3, ‘Yes to the cultural rights of the individual’   |
|                       | November 4, ‘Did Gen. Basbug mean to say ‘We are also in politics’   |
|                       | November 5, ‘‘The opposition in the government’ completes its second year in the government’   |

*Sabah* avoided reporting the messages from the briefing that pertain to the EU report; on the contrary, it chose to highlight the TAF’s opinions on Kirkuk under the following title: “Nothing new in Kirkuk”. As such it aimed at reducing the pressures placed on the government by the speculative news that the government was contemplating about dragging the country into a war over Kirkuk. One of the columns discussed the debate about “the cultural rights of the individual” while the other two were critical of the military’s decision to hold a briefing. The criticisms were concerned with the military’s interference with politics, which in the columnists’ eyes, prevented the government from implementing its own program.

### ***Milliyet***

*Milliyet*, which belongs to the same holding company as *Hürriyet* and *Radikal*, stands between the populist *Hürriyet* and the intellectual *Radikal* in terms of its publication policy. The most common words used to describe *Milliyet* are “respected and serious”.

**Table 4: Milliyet**

| Page                  | 1 and inner pages  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Title                 | The Military sends important messages to the EU  |
| Subtitle              | Sensitivity over minority issue  |
| Spot                  | “Unitary state cannot be discussed”  |
| Introduction sentence | The Deputy Chief of Staff Gen. İlker Basbug, after underlining that Atatürk described the Turkish people as a single nation, stated that the TAF did not approve of opening the state’s unitary structure to discussion. |
| Text/Message          | 2, 3, 7  |
| Photo                 | A photo showing Gen. Basbug’s face   |
| Column (date/title)   | November 3, “Stone thrown into water ...”<br>November 3, “Europe’s Çankaya”  |

Overall, the newspaper tended to accentuate the TAF’s messages about the unitary structure of the state. The titles of the news stories were intended to draw the EU’s attention to the sensitivity of this issue for the Turkish military which also manifested itself in the news text. The two respective columns on the subject were supportive of the military’s point of view on the unitary state.

Two days after the briefing, *Milliyet* ran a story on a special interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül. The title of the interview, attributed to Gül’s remarks, was: “Our understanding of the minority issue is no different from the TAF’s.”

#### ***Radikal***

*Radikal* is usually preferred by a more intellectual readership. In its publishing policy, it has adopted a more critical and investigatory approach. These qualities also were reflected in the way the newspaper covered the briefing. *Radikal*, which has a critical stance on the interference of the military in politics, in an attempt to downplay the press briefing, did not include the news story in the first page, but reported it in the inner pages.

**Table 5: Radikal**

| Page     | Inner pages   |
|----------|---|
| Title    | General Staff: You cannot create minorities by force  |
| Subtitle | -   |
| Spot     | “Turning minority rights into group rights and extending them to political sphere is not acceptable according to internationally recognized opinions” |



|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Introduction sentence | The General Staff, joining in discussions on the minority rights, stated that Turkey's approach to minorities which was finalized in the Lausanne Treaty is confined to individual and cultural rights. |
| Text/Message          | 1, 2, 7   |
| Photo                 | -   |
| Article (date/title)  | November 3, "Individual right – Group right"  |
|                       | November 4, "The definition of informing"   |
|                       | November 4, "Another definition of minority by the TAF"   |
|                       | November 5, "The term 'undisputable'"   |
|                       | November 6, "What does the military think?"   |

The first part of the briefing text which contains the assessment about the military situation regarding the problems with Greece and the Kirkuk issue and the part which contains the TAF's views on minority rights made to the news story ran by *Radikal*. Four of the five columns on the subject criticized the briefing both for its form and content. The columnists stated that it was not the military's business to provide information to the public. They criticized the military's use of the term "undisputable" mentioned in the message statement (code 3): "Any attempt to open Turkey's unitary state structure into debate can never be approved of by the TAF".

### ***Vatan***

*Vatan* claims to follow a neutral publication policy. As a reflection of this policy, it featured headline stories about important news on both the TAF and the government.

**Table 6: Vatan**

| <b>Page</b>           | <b>Inner pages</b>  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Title                 | "A unitary state either exists or not"  |
| Subtitle              | "No plan to intervene in Kirkuk"  |
| Spot                  | "Reaction to the opinions on minorities"  |
| Introduction sentence | Gen. Basbug said that the TAF did not approve of opening the state's unitary structure to discussion. |
| Text/Message          | 2, 6, 8, 12   |
| Photo                 | A photo showing Gen. Basbug's left hand as a fist   |
| Column (date/title)   | November 8, "You could call it discipline, but..."  |

The significant point in *Vatan*'s reporting which deserves special attention is that it features the story about the briefing in its inner pages. The TAF's message about the unitary state is used both in the title and the introduction of the story. The only column pertaining to the press briefing was praising the way the briefing was organized by comparing it to the ones organized by civilians.

***Cumhuriyet***

*Cumhuriyet*'s publication policy is close to a statist-nationalist line. Therefore, in the title of the news story, it interprets the TAF briefing as 'the soldiers' scolding on the minorities issue,' and in its spot and introduction as 'hard reaction'.

**Table 7: Cumhuriyet**

| Page                  | 1 and inner pages   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Title                 | The soldiers' scolding on the minorities issue  |
| Subtitle              | 'The unitary structure is undisputable'   |
| Spot                  | Gen. Basbug, explicating the TAF's opinions, delivered a severe statement about the discussions on minorities, sparked by the EU progress report. |
| Introduction sentence | Gen. Basbug expressed his reaction to the minority issue causing disagreement among the public.   |
| Text/Message          | 1, 2, 4, 6, 8   |
| Photo                 | 2 photos of Gen. Basbug + 1 map of Turkey   |
| Column (date/title)   | November 6, 'Secret intentions'   |
|                       | November 6, 'General situation'   |
|                       | November 9, 'Chat in the morning'   |

*Cumhuriyet* reprinted the appendix to the press briefing that was distributed to journalists which had Ataturk's words, "the people of Turkey who founded the Turkish Republic are called the Turkish nation" printed on a map of Turkey in Ataturk's own handwriting. All three commentaries were supportive of the TAF's statement. One day after the press briefing, the newspaper also featured a story regarding the statement of the CHP -the major opposition party- with the title, "TAF's position is correct."

***Ortadogu***

*Ortadogu*'s publishing policy is strictly nationalist. In its news story covering the briefing, the parts of the TAF text where the terms "nationalism" and "nation" are used were stressed in an attempt to derive legitimacy for its own point of view.

**Table 8: Ortadogu**

| Page                 | 1 and inner page   |
|----------------------|--|
| Title                | The military has spoken its final words  |
| Subtitle             | A shocking response to defenders of the minority rights by the military: Turkey belongs to the Turks |
| Spot                 | We cannot forget our martyrs   |
| Entrance Sentence    | Important statements have been made at the press briefing in the TAF Headquarters.                   |
| Text/message         | 1, 2, 3, 4, 12   |
| Photograph           | 3 photos of Gen. Basbug (In one of them his fist is shown)   |
| Columns (Date/Title) | 4 November "Opening the unitary state to discussion"   |
|                      | 4 November "What is the military saying?"  |
|                      | 4 November "Lesson given by Gen. Basbug"   |

Especially through its choice of headline, i.e., “the military has spoken its final words,” the message contained in the subtitle, “shocking answer: Turkey belong to the Turks,” and the photograph on which Gen. Basbug’s fist is shown, *Cumhuriyet* wanted to take a strong position on the briefing, which was completely in line with the publishing strategy of the newspaper. The columns also have a similar content supporting the military’s remarks.

### ***Yeni Safak***

The owner of the *Yeni Safak* is a close friend of the Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan. The newspaper’s journalism practices make observers think that as if it were acting as the government’s unofficial voice.

**Table 9: Yeni Safak**

| <b>Page</b>             | <b>Inner page</b>   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Title                   | -   |
| Subtitle                | -   |
| Spot                    | General Staff: The flights are normal   |
| Entrance Sentence       | Sub-spot: The Deputy Chief of Staff Gen. Basbug too denied Greece’s accusations that “Turkey has increased its flights over the Aegean Sea” |
| Text/message            | 1   |
| Photograph              | -   |
| Columns<br>(Date/Title) | 4 November “Why has <i>Milliyet</i> used this headline?”  |
|                         | 4 November “General Staff’s Briefing”   |
|                         | 4 November “Above all: objections to the format”  |

Whereas other newspapers focused on certain themes, *Yeni Safak* preferred to cover it minimally, almost to the extent of ignoring it. In its inner pages, it published the first message of the briefing as a spot under other news. This spot, and the sentence under it stated merely that the relations between Greece and Turkey were normal. The commentators made a case it was not appropriate for the military to hold such a press briefing.

### ***Zaman and Vakit***

*Both newspapers ignored the briefing.*

### **Conclusion**

Of the 10 newspapers covered in this case study, five featured the TAF briefing on their first page, two covered it on their inner pages, whereas three did not publish it. The newspapers publishing news stories about the briefing on their first pages are the ones with wide circulation rates, which are defined as liberal, populist and centralist (*Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, and *Milliyet* respectively) as well as the *ulusalci* –neo-nationalist- and nationalist newspapers (*Cumhuriyet*, and *Ortadogu* respectively). The newspapers in the first category understandably are responsive to the information that originate from the

military. Given their high circulation rates, they are forced to respond to median reader's interest in news about the military-related issues. The nationalist newspapers, on the other hand, obviously value the opinions of the military and cover the military's statements eagerly.

The newspapers which did not cover the briefing or covered it minimally (*Zaman*, *Vakit*, and *Yeni Safak*) are known for being close to the government, and ideologically they are considered right wing extremist/conservative and in some cases are associated with religious sects. Moreover, especially *Yeni Safak* and *Zaman* are owned by groups which have close connections with the governing Justice and Development party, which gives us another reason why they preferred not to publicize an event that might have undermined the government's image and popularity. As a matter of fact, these newspapers were not invited to the press briefing since they are not accredited by the TAF. For this reason, we also explored the possibility of whether their reason for not publishing the news about the briefing was due to their absence at the meeting. *Yeni Safak* and *Vakit* covered the previous (July 8, 2004) and the next (January 24, 2005) TAF briefings in their pages, to which they were not invited either. These newspapers purposefully avoided producing news that might hinder the EU membership process, which was expected to expand the scope for religious freedoms in line with their own interests. In addition, because they were supportive of the government, they attempted to deemphasize an issue, i.e., dispute with the military, which could cause trouble for the government in the EU membership process, which was an important project for the government. The other daily *Zaman*, on the other hand, which is known to be connected to a religious sect, prefers not to publish any news about the TAF's press briefings. This policy could be a reaction to the TAF's attitude towards sects; by turning a deaf ear to the TAF's briefings the *Zaman* attempts to ignore the TAF's political role.

Maintaining its liberal/centralist and balanced approach, *Hürriyet* published a considerable part of the speech. Due to its policy of supporting the government, similar to the right-wing and conservative newspapers, *Sabah* mainly focused on the messages regarding Kirkuk, which helped relieve the government in domestic politics at a critical juncture, and chose to ignore other themes from the TAF press brief.

*Cumhuriyet*, again in line with its neonationalist –ulusalci- line, emphasized the unitary state, whereas *Ortadoğu* focused on the concept of nation. *Ortadoğu* also included a photograph of Gen. Basbug, in which his hand looked like a fist.

*Radikal*'s critical approach was reflected in its coverage of the news, in which it made a point that the issues defined as undisputable by the TAF could be discussed as well. *Vatan* demonstrated its "objective" approach to publishing in its reporting of the briefing. It covered most of the themes from the TAF text in a balanced manner, and its columnists avoided taking a position. In line with *Vatan*'s objectivity policy, TAF's important briefing found its place in the inner pages of the newspaper. This could be interpreted as an expression of goodwill to the government from *Vatan*'s management who were contemplating to buy a television channel in a state bid.

While the TAF's statement that "it will continue to inform the press" found place only in *Hürriyet* -because it published the whole message- none of the newspapers mentioned the TAF's critical position on the media's style in managing news, which was at the end of the TAF briefing. This shared position is an indication of the media institutions' reluctance to cover criticism raised against their publication policies. Because starting to question the media's own approach to the production of news could unleash a process that may result in undermining the credibility of the media in the eyes of the general public.

Overall, the newspapers which covered the press briefing focused less on institutional news directly related to the TAF, and rather preferred to devote greater attention to messages pertaining to "minorities" and the TAF's evaluation of the EU. This preference conforms to one of the common attitudes of the media in selecting news stories: in general, media institutions tend to cover conflicts more than several other issues as reflected in the common understanding that "when there is a conflict, there is a news story as well." Both the minorities issue and the TAF's remarks on the EU concerned ongoing or potential points of conflict, confrontation, or tension; hence, were deemed to be of high value news.

The case study focused on how the media framed the briefings the TAF delivered during the membership process into the EU, which has significant implications for Turkey's social, economic and political transformation, given that the TAF holds an important place in the political life of Turkey. The TAF transmits its messages at different times and through various channels to its target group. The information briefings to the media are one of the most effective means the TAF uses as part of its overall communication management strategy. In the reporting process, the content and meaning of the news is redefined under the prism of a newspapers' overall publishing policy. The new meaning of the news created by the context is constructed through the news rhetoric. Thus, the organizational messages of the TAF find a place in the press in line with the broadcasting policies of the newspapers.

The case study of the TAF's briefing on November 2, 2004 lends support to the hypotheses set at the outset. The first assumption concerning the TAF's motivation to convey its own message to the public in the framework of its own institutional communication holds in this case. As the content analysis of the newspapers included in the case study shows, they reported the press briefing in accordance with their publication policies, and relations to the capital. Whereas the TAF utilizes the media in its communication with the public, the media in turn produces the news stories about the military in line with its own policies as well as its perception of the TAF's historical, social, and political role.

The second assumption that posits that despite the variations in the coverage of news, most media institutions deem the TAF's opinions on the EU membership project important is also confirmed. Five out of ten newspapers analyzed here (*Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Milliyet*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Ortadoğu*) covered the briefing in great detail by including most of the messages in the front page as well as in the inner pages. Another three (*Vatan*, *Radikal*, and *Yeni Safak*) covered the briefing in the inner pages; they were

more selective in choosing the messages to be reported, and highlighted only the ones in line with their publication policy. The Islamist newspapers experiencing confrontation with the military, such as *Zaman*, and *Vakit*, preferred to ignore this important news story.

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