



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

This research is being conducted as part of Eurasia Partnership Foundation's project "Reducing Media Bias in Armenia and Turkey" supported by Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United States Agency for International Development.

### 1.Scope of the Survey

The coded newspapers included three dailies **Hayots Ashkharh, Aravot, Haykakan Zhamanak**, and two news websites **PanARMENIAN.Net, A1plus.am**, selected based on number of copies (for print media) and number of visitors (for news websites); political orientation (pro-governmental, opposition, neutral); as well as rating (according to the last data of the media rating surveys). The articles from the sampled media included all the verbal texts with a single composition and design, including the characteristics of its genre, the title, the subtitle, the lead of the article, which covered issues related to Armenian-Turkish relations, whether fully or partially.

The time frames of the study involved the months of April and September of 2006 through 2008, and April 2009. The choice of the months was conditioned by the hypothesized activation in the overall reference to Armenian-Turkish relations in April, and the general passivity in September, with an exception of September 2008, connected with Turkish president's visit to Yerevan, enabling the measurement of the picture with the coverage of the topic in varying social-political contexts.

The survey of the Turkish press covers five daily newspapers: **Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Yeni Safak** and **Zaman**. These five titles represent main groups and tendencies of the media in Turkey. They also cover "main stream" and smaller, so-called "serious" titles.

**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.

## 2. Genre

The decisive majority of the studied articles appeared as news (79.2 %), followed by interviews with a major margin (7.6%), and commentaries and analysis coming third in the row of preferred genres (6.6%).

The results showed that among the print media *Aravot* daily revealed the highest degree of reliance on news as a genre of covering Armenian-Turkish relations (74.8%). (The data on *PanARMENIAN.Net* and *A1plus.am* internet sources – 94.7% and 85.3%, respectively, - should not be taken in comparison with the print media, in this case, due to their more inclination of positioning themselves as news media.) Interestingly, *Aravot* also appeared to be the medium with the least use of commentaries/analyses as a journalistic genre in regard to this issue (2.6%). In contrast to *Aravot*, *Haykakan Zhamanak* produced almost 10 times more commentaries/analyses (20.9%), and the least number of news reports (66.5%) within all stories on the issue produced by this medium.

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

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.

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

The collected data shows that out of 1,570 cases in 346 (22%) the writing of the article has been initiated by a specifically media targeted event, including an announcement, press release, or a press conference, and interview, media publication, or a public speech in 283 cases (18%). Articles have also been initiated by official visits (5.5%), state, religious holidays, or memorial days (5.1%), rallies, demonstrations and other acts of protests (3.6% + 0.3%, authorized and unauthorized, respectively), legislative motions (3.6%), publication of open letters (3.2%). Articles with no identified initiating event or act have comprised 11.7% of the overall number of coded pieces.

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%).

#### 4. Initiating event/act

Significant portion of the issues identified by the monitoring have tended to appear within the context of intergovernmental relations between Armenia and Turkey only (27.1%), regional conflicts (7.2%), foreign policy (6.2%), and culture and cultural policies (4.1%), occupying the top five positions.

Economic stories are practically absent.

“Sports” is almost 2.5 % of all items surveyed.

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.

Economic topics are practically absent. Only 2% of the items surveyed are under the topic “culture,” social issues are 3%, customs and traditions 0,2%.

“Sports” 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.

## 5. Sourcing

The monitoring revealed that in 50.6% of the cases Armenian media heavily relied on one source when covering Armenian-Turkish relations, with 27.1% quoting two sources, and in only 10.1% the number of sources equaled to 3. In 21.6% of cases sources were media, with the government getting 13.7% coming second. Interestingly in the case of the sources the representatives of science and education preceded the president with a margin in 0.2% (7.5% of the experts against 7.3% of the head of country). Diaspora was quoted in only 2.1% of cases, and ordinary people 1.3%. Similarly, local and international non-governmental organizations, received 1.8% and 3.6% of representation as sources.

Armenian media appeared to give more preference to the combination of direct and reported speech (32.1%) than to each form separately (28.6% of direct against 29.2% of reported).

The distribution of sources across Armenian/Turkish/third sides showed dramatic discrepancy with more than half of the quoted sources originating from Armenian side (53.4%), against the 25.6% of the third side sources, and even less – 20.5% - of the Turkish sources.

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.

## 6. Conclusion

The content analysis of the Armenian media revealed a number of major tendencies in covering of Armenian-Turkish relations.

1. The issue is within the focus of the media attention, independent of whether there is any claimed stimulus (social, political, economic, cultural, etc.) outside the media discourse facilitating it or not.

2. In the great majority of cases media prefer covering the issue in news genre.

3. In a preference to cover the Armenian-Turkish relations more as news, the media overlook genres like interview, or commentaries.

4. All sampled Armenian media, independent of the channel of distribution, represent the Armenian-Turkish relations within the context of the bilateral relations on governmental level. Further, the relations are in a significant portion of cases viewed within the context of foreign policy.

5. Whenever covered, the issues within the frames of Armenian-Turkish relations are the only topic of discussion in article, although they are sometimes also combined with others.

6. The geographic boundaries of the issue in Armenian media go far beyond Armenia and

The survey of some 450 articles 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

Turkey, and even the South Caucasus and extend to US and Europe, but leave behind immediate countries like Russia, Iran, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

7. As to the time limits of the reflections on Armenian-Turkish relations in Armenian media, the major period under the scrutiny of Armenian media were the two decades since Armenia's independence in 1991, with a large portion of formal attention to future references.

8. Unlike the US, often referred to as an actor in the context of Armenian-Turkish relations in the journalistic pieces, Europe is involved mostly as a general geopolitical concept, with low representation of particular European structures like the European Union or the Council of Europe.

Among other actors receiving special attention of the media are presidents and governments, although preference is mostly given to Armenian authorities.

9. The situation repeated also with the sources, with a major discrepancy between Armenian and Turkish sources.

Despite the prevalence of the use of facts and the reliance on news as genre, the distribution of the Armenian and Turkish viewpoints appeared unequal 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.