ARTICLE

Gezi Park Protests as a Litmus Test for Mainstream Western Media

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ABSTRACT *This article focuses on the coverage of Gezi Park protests in the mainstream Western media. It analyzes the details of the incidents and argues that the Gezi Park protests became a negative turning point in the already worsening quality of foreign media coverage of Turkey and AK Party. It argues that the basic codes of media ethics have been frequently violated, while Erdoğan-phobia became an almost unquestionable rule for the Western mainstream media in the post-Gezi era.*

Despite the new communicative opportunities presented by social media, the mainstream media remains the key site of discourses with significant power over narratives that represent and shape Western societies. Nick Couldry describes 'media power' as "the concentration in media institutions of the symbolic power of "constructing reality" (both factual representations and credible fictions)."[1] In this framework, the mainstream media has an important role in influencing identity and policy narratives that are dominant amongst both the public and the elite. The term 'mainstream' here roughly denotes the most widely circulated print media as well as the most heavily trafficked online media and the most watched/listened broadcast networks.

The mainstream media is uniquely positioned to exert control over discourse through its operation as a central institution of information production and its relations to other dominant institutions.[2] Although dominant ideologies and their variations are jointly produced by the elite class, "media elites have the special role and persuasive power to control dominant discourse reproduction among the population at large."[3] It is predominantly the media elite's defini-

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tion of the situation that contributes to the manufacturing of public opinion.

In its first term, the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) was frequently praised by the mainstream Western media as a 'model' that had to be exported to the rest of the Muslim world. Its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was applauded as one of the rarest blends in the Islamic world and the champion of Turkey's westernisation reforms.[4] Western mainstream media was predominantly talking about Turkey's success story under AK Party rule. Erdoğan's record in both economic and foreign affairs was generally described as "nigh-impeccable."[5]

However, this situation has gradually changed especially with the worsening of Turkish-Israeli relations after the Davos and Mavi Marmara incidents, the downfall of Turkey's EU membership process and the increase of active foreign policy choices of the AK Party government that are more independent from its traditional Western allies. Personal attacks against Erdoğan have become more common firstly in the pro-Israeli and neo-con segments of the Western media. Yet, the Gezi Park protests in 2013 has become a tragic turning point and opened a new era within which basic codes of media ethics (such as impartiality, truthfulness and fairness[6]) are frequently violated and anti-Erdoğan attitudes have become an almost unquestionable rule for the mainstream Western media. Provocative messages, including calls for violence, were widely distributed without checking their authenticity during the events. Some well-known representatives of Western media outlets did not hesitate to misinform their audiences about what was happening or to act as active participants of the protests.

What Happened in Gezi Park?

Turkey was paralyzed by mass protests over the eviction of a peaceful sit-in at Istanbul's Gezi Park on May 31, 2013. The demonstrations sparked and spread to various cities around Turkey in a short period of time, and they turned into broader protests against AK Party and specifically Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Foreign media, including but not limited to *CNN*, *BBC*, *Al Jazeera, France 24, German ZDF, Der Spiegel, Reuters, The New York Times* and *Russia Today* showed unprecedented interest in the events, compared to previous domestic incidents in Turkey, and described them as "the biggest challenge to Erdoğan and his governing Justice and Development Party during

their decade in power."[7] *CNN* broadcasted seven-hour continuous live coverage to its American audience about events in Taksim on June 11, 2013. At the same time, media outlets such as *The Guardian* and *Associated Press* portrayed the demonstrations as "Turkey's most widespread anti-government protests in decades."[8] From the very first day of the protests, some foreign journalists started to talk about "a potential Turkish Spring."[9]

Amid escalating tension and growing opposition, the Turkish government started a negotiation process with the representatives of the Taksim Platform, a solidarity group formed to oppose the planned demolition of Gezi Park in Taksim. The group listed its demands, including a decision to end the redevelopment of Gezi Park and termination of other irrelevant projects like the construction of a third bridge on the Strait and a third airport in İstanbul. Ironically, the Taksim Platform representatives expressed that they did not accept a referendum over the issue. They even claimed that "in developed democratic countries a referendum cannot be held" over such an issue, and they wanted the government to abide by their demands without question.[10] This approach clearly put the 'democratic demands' argument of the protestors in jeopardy.

In the following meeting with the representatives of the protestors, the government stepped back from its initial redevelopment plan about Gezi Park and proposed a referendum on the issue. A deal with the representatives was reached on the 14th of June and the government asked the protesters to evacuate the park. The protesters, who were divided over the decision of whether to stay, first announced that they would leave, but they later issued another statement declaring that they reject the referendum over the redevelopment plan and that they would "stay in the park and continue the resistance," without defining any deadline or concrete aim.[11] Upon this decision, police forces evicted Taksim Square and Gezi Park on 15th of June, but protests of varying degrees continued elsewhere.

Many different groups of people joined these protests for a multitude of reasons and some of these were members of illegal and known terrorist organizations. Alongside flags of marginal far-left political parties such as the Turkish Communist Party (TKP) and Workers Party (İP) and their youth organizations like Turkey Youth Union (TGB), the protestors were also openly carrying signs and flags of organizations such as the PKK and the DHKP-C, which are both recognized as terrorist organizations by Turkey, EU and USA.

A considerable group of activists hurled fireworks, firebombs and stones at police. The Turkish Interior Ministry stated that within the first five days of the protests 280 workplaces, 6 public buildings, 103 police vehicles, 207 private vehicles including live broadcasting vans of news agencies, one residency, one police station, and 12 AK Party district buildings were damaged, with a total cost

The Western media ignored the damage done by the Gezi protesters towards public and private properties.

AFP PHOTO / BÜLENT KILIÇ

over 40 million dollars.[12] Moreover, the protestors' vandalism targeted international companies like *Starbucks*, which declared its concern over their personnel's safety and condemned the hate speech of protestors against the company.[13]

Foreign and domestic anti-government media alongside the majority of foreign analyses based their arguments on the assumption that protestors were representing all segments of Turkish society except the AK Party supporters. Foreign media outlets like *The Economist* asserted that these mass protests were "the expression of the long-stifled resentment felt by nearly half of the electorate who did not vote for the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party in the June 2011 parliamentary elections."[14] Moreover analysts like Paul Mason from *BBC*, claimed "the breadth of social support –within the urban enclave of Istanbul– was bigger than Greece and closer to Egypt." Nevertheless, the only source of his assertion was a quote from a protestor saying "Everyone is here - except the AK Party."[15]

However, two out of three major political parties, namely the Turkish Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and Kurdish nationalist Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), strongly criticized these protests and the vandalism applied by these groups. If voter bases of these political parties are kept in mind (AK Party 50 percent, MHP 13 percent, BDP 7 percent in 2011 General Elections), political representatives of a decisive majority of the electorate (more than 70 percent) expressed their opposition to these protests. Both MHP and BDP denounced the protests and asked their followers not to participate in these

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events. Devlet Bahçeli, one of the hard line opponents of Erdoğan and the leader of Turkish nationalist MHP stated that "sympathizers of the terrorist organization PKK and marginal leftist groups" had provoked these protests to destabilize the country. He unequivocally refuted claims about a possible "Turkish spring," and denounced vandalism that targeted public and private properties. Bahçeli also condemned efforts as "baseness" in the media to link MHP supporters with these protests and said that any member of MHP who wants to participate in these demonstrations should resign from the party first. He also underlined that the only place to overthrow the AK Party government was the ballot box and not those provocative protests. [16]

İdris Baluken, Vice-Chairman of the Kurdish nationalist BDP Group in Parliament, noted that slogans and symbols of *status quo* had prevailed during the protests and added "we will never position ourselves side by side with these racist, sexist and militarist groups under any circumstances." According to Baluken, the protests were merely a result of revanchist feelings of groups (mainly the Kemalists) that "have been holding Turkish society under captivity for decades."[17] However, it should be noted that BDP member Sırrı Süreyya Önder was one of the leading figures during the protests and BDP supporters were among the protestors.

Likewise, the Felicity Party, the fourth largest opposition party according to the latest general elections, condemned the provocations of "marginal groups" for "turning the streets into battlefields." The Party published an official declaration to denounce Western media for naming the events as "Turkish Spring" and announced that their supporters will never be involved in such "violent" protests that are abused by "illegal and marginal groups."[18]

Public survey conducted by the Andy-Ar Center for Social Research two weeks after the beginning of the protests showed that 83 percent of the Turkish population was against the continuation of the protests, while only 7 percent endorsed the continuation of the demonstrations (and 10 percent undecided).[19] Even foreign observers who are sympathetic towards the Taksim protest like Piotr Zalewski of the *Time Magazine* accepted that "the protests have included mostly young leftists, environmentalists and secularists, all of them core government opponents."[20]

CHP was the only major political actor that continuously supported the protests. As has been emphasized by Bekir Berat Özipek from Istanbul Medipol

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University, protests were mainly in rich districts of Istanbul, where wealthy Kemalists were residing, instead of relatively poorer areas.[21] Supporters of the protests in Turkey ran a full-page ad in the *New York Times* to explain why the demonstrators were so angry with then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his government. They initially explained their ideological background by defining themselves as "the proud inheritors of Atatürk's legacy."[22] A comprehensive survey conducted among protestors inside and outside Gezi Park by GENAR Research Center revealed that 74 percent of the protestors were supporters of the main opposition leftist/Kemalist party CHP and 15 percent of protestors were supporters of socialist/Kurdish nationalist BDP. The remaining major group (6 percent) consisted of supporters from other left-wing parties, namely the Turkish Communist Party, Workers Party and Democratic Left Party.[23]

Coalition of Supporters for the Protests

Taksim protestors received support from an interesting coalition of domestic and foreign actors with anti-AK Party leanings. As has been mentioned, a coalition of left-wing parties (including Republican People's Party, Turkish Communist Party, Workers Party and Democratic Left Party) was the main domestic driving force behind the demonstrations. Anti-government print media (including *Hürriyet*, *Sözcü*, *Milliyet*, *Aydınlık*, *Taraf*, *Cumhuriyet, Zaman* and *Radikal*) played a prominent role as well. Foreign media, including but not limited to *CNN*, *BBC*, *Al Jazeera*, *France 24*, *German ZDF* and *Russia Today* followed an identical anti-Erdoğan attitude during this process.

A decisive majority of foreign media coverage included only views from the protestors and academics/journalists/analyst that are famous for their anti-Erdoğan attitude. Their comments were provided as 'specialist opinion' without mentioning their ideological preferences, although most of them have expressed their support for the protests or participated in demonstrations themselves or even declared to give extra points to their students who join the demonstrators (as in the case of Professor Veysel Batmaz from İstanbul University[24]). Erdoğan-bashing became prominent in discourses of a wide range of media coverage. As James Reynolds from *BBC News* underlines, it seemed

to be "tempting to conclude from the demonstrations in Taksim Square and Gezi Park that the entire country is against Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan."[25] Very few foreign media outlets felt the necessity to give information about what those who oppose the demonstrators think. Yet, most of those few reporters interestingly preferred to interview AK Party supporters in poor areas of Istanbul, which possibly provided the suitable background for strengthening the image of *modern seculars vs. backward Islamists* dichotomy in their discourse.[26]

There was an interesting parallelism between the publications of different media outlets that normally clash on all other issues. For instance, *Nasr TV* in Iran was showing its capabilities as a propaganda tool by fabricating disinformation, claiming that the Turkish government was "destroying Taksim Square as a historical site with the aim of stopping revolution and progress." Interesting coverage by *Nasr TV*, which was more like a propaganda video than a news report, stated that the "Erdoğan government does not stand for Islam; it does not stand for democracy. But, it is another pawn in the hands of the Americans." As the strongest ally of Syria's Assad regime, *Nasr TV* explained the motive behind the Taksim protests as the opposition from Turkish people to AK Party government for "working with the Americans and the Saudis and others to overthrow the government in Damascus."[27] Interestingly, commanders from Bashar al-Assad's Syrian army published support videos for protestors, with banners saying "resisting Syrian people are shoulder to shoulder with resisting Turkish people."[28]

The demonstrators were also supported by global hacker network Anonymous and Redhack, the largest Turkish Socialist hacker organization. These groups launched cyber-attacks under the title of "Operation Turkey #opTurkey" against the websites of Turkish Presidency, Prime Ministry, various ministries, state organizations, AK Party and some media companies like *NTV*.[29] Moreover, several Twitter accounts like the one owned by The U.S. Consulate in Istanbul were compromised to publish tweets supporting the protests.[30]

Egyptian author Fehmi Huveydi quoted Moshe Feiglin, Deputy Speaker of Israeli Parliament, by stating that "we are praying for protests in Turkey to continue until Erdoğan is toppled," while Former Foreign Minister Avigador Lieberman, renowned for his anti-Turkish sentiments, expressed that "Turkey's domestic issues are not our business, but I cannot hide my happiness about the protests." [31]

In his interview with *The Voice of Russia Radio*, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the founder and the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and Vice-Chairman of the State Duma, asserted that Erdoğan's policies were not in the interest of Russia and Taksim protests were the same as The Orange Revolution that took place in Ukraine from late November 2004 to January

2005. He also claimed that "Erdoğan has no future" and called on the Turkish military to take control of the government.[32]

Curiously, some wealthy families in Turkey, which had supported military interventions in the past, expressed their support for the demonstrations, although they have impressively increased their wealth during the economic success story of AK Party. Koç Holding, the top industrial conglomerate owned by the Koç family as one of Turkey's wealthiest families, supported the protests. It has even called on the students of Koç University to participate in the protests. Cem Boyner**,** Chairman of Boyner Holding, one of the leading non-food retail groups in Turkey, and Ergun Özen, CEO of Garanti Bank owned by Doğuş Group, one of the top three largest private-sector conglomerates in Turkey, were also among those who openly declared their support for the protests.

Some foreign analysts like Steven Cook, senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, and politicians like Claudia Roth, the Co-Chair of German Green Party, came to Istanbul to join the protests in person and published anti-Erdoğan messages.[33] Efgani Dönmez, a parliamentarian from the Austrian Green Party, proposed to deport the supporters of Erdoğan from Austria. Referring to the Austrian advocates of Erdoğan with Turkish origin, who announced a big demonstration in Vienna with participation of up to 5000 Erdoğan supporters as a reaction to Taksim protests, Dönmez said "5000 one-way tickets and no one would weep for those..."[34] Some foreign analysts like Professor Udo Steinbach, the head of the Governance Center of Middle East and North Africa at the Humboldt-Viadrina School of Governance in Berlin, did not even hesitate from likening Erdoğan to dictator Assad of Syria and defaming him by calling him "cement head."[35]

Social Media as the Driving Force behind the Protests

Social media is a useful open platform in which any type of information and thought can be shared. Nevertheless, it can also have negative influences on its users. From this point forth, regarding her experiences during Taksim protests, Elif Şafak, one of the most internationally famous Turkish writers, pointed out that "social media is open to misinformation, baseless rumors, hate speech and conspiracy theories."[36] During these protests, it served as the main platform for the organization of events and communication. However, it was also the source of information chaos as well. Some provocative messages were distributed, including calls for violence. Moreover, those messages found an important place in the Turkish and international mainstream media.

One of the iconic inflammatory news items, which proved to be false later, was that a girl aged 26 was overrun by a police armored vehicle and died

during the protests. Anti-government public figures including some singers and TV stars (some of them having over a million Twitter followers during the protests) shared this false news with their followers. It was re-tweeted by thousands of protestors. Newspapers like *Cumhuriyet*, with Kemalist ideology, declared that they were absolutely certain about the story. At the height of tensions, Adnan Keskin, Vice-President of the main opposition party CHP, telephoned pro-CHP TV station *Halk TV* and claimed that he had confirmed the death of the girl from his sources. He asserted that the mainstream media was under the influence of the government and condemned the media for not covering this story. Then a photo alleged to be proof of a person overrun by a police vehicle was widely distributed among supporters of the protest, including CHP members. However, it was later understood that the story was a provocative lie. The photo distributed as the proof turned out to be an old photo of an accident abroad. Adnan Keskin admitted that he was wrong and blamed Twitter for misleading him. Other public figures who shared the story on their Twitter accounts silently deleted those tweets.

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One other baseless rumor was the claim about Istanbul Police using Agent Orange (a deadly toxic substance used by U.S. military as part of its chemical warfare program during the Vietnam War) against protesters. This news was highly distributed among protestors since it was published on *CNN*'s website in its iReport section, where users share their story. After being spread by tens of thousands of protestors, the piece was removed by *CNN* a few days later with the following statement: "This iReport, which claimed that police in Istanbul have been using Agent Orange against protesters, has been removed. *CNN* reporters there have seen no indication this is the case. Police in Istanbul have been using a colored substance, according to protestors, which may be the source of the confusion."[37]

Another manipulated iconic photograph was allegedly showing some police officers using pepper spray towards a dog. However, the uniforms of police officers were blurred in the distributed photo. Newspapers like Britain's *Daily Mail* used this photo alongside others in their news coverage under the title "Now DOGS are being tear-gassed: Heartbreaking images of pets caught in carnage as police target protestors for a fifth day in Turkey."[38] However, the un-blurred original photo came out later and the police uniforms in the photo showed that the photo was not even taken in Turkey. Thereupon, the *Daily Mail* removed the photo from its website.

Western media focusing only on the Gezi protests, not only did not cover the large scale "Respect for the National Will" rallies organized by the AK Party but also gave a warped view of the real situation in Turkey.

The claim about the government interference to ban the access to social media websites was another provocative disinformation used by protestors and shared by others to incite public reaction. Influenced by these rumors, journalists like Byron Acohido from *USA Today* started talking about "reported Internet censorship" to prevent social media access of protestors.[39] However, let alone being censored, social media saw record levels of accession from Turkey during the protests. As a study by New York University revealed, "at least 2 million tweets with hashtags related to the Turkish protests were sent in just eight hours on May 31 when protests gathered steam, around 90 percent of them from Turkey and 50 percent of them from İstanbul. In comparison, Egypt's main protest hashtag was tweeted less than 1 million times throughout the country's entire revolutionary period and only about 30 percent of people tweeting during the Egyptian revolution in 2011 were actually in Egypt."[40]

Detailed analysis by Sandra González-Bailón at the Oxford Internet Institute and Pablo Barberá of New York University's Social Media and Political Participation Laboratory also revealed how systematically social media was used during the protests. As their analysis showed, "just one percent of users generated about 80 percent of all retweets."[41]

Some of the many other similar fictitious news and manipulated photos distributed by anti-government journalists, politicians, activists, TV celebrities

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and managers of prominent companies that turned out to be tools for provocations were as follows: Police is using real bullets... Keep up; if we continue the protests for over 48 hours, the government will fall according to EU laws... Thousands of police officers resigned to protest government... There is only one name to be used for politics that uses chemical weapons against its own people for 20 hours: fascism. The name of the government that allows this is: dictatorship... Police is distributing water-containing drugs in order to put the protestors to sleep and detain them... (Using a photo from Intercontinental Istanbul Eurasia Marathon) Tens of thousands are crossing the Bosphorus Bridge to join the protestors... Help! Spread the word. Istanbul on fire @nytimes @AFP @BBCWorld... Hundreds of Islamists are heading to Taksim with Kalashnikovs… It is unbelievable!!! The government is killing its own people/us in front of us/its people again @CNN... Turkish PM Erdoğan calls for a mass slaughter of the protestors![42]

Erdoğan-phobia within Dominant Discourse in the Mainstream Media

After the honeymoon between AK Party and the mainstream Western media ended, "Islamist" has become the single dominant adjective used for the AK Party and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Personal attacks against Erdoğan have become more common firstly in the pro-Israeli and neo-con segments of the Western media. For instance, *Bloomberg View* columnist and *The Atlantic*'s national correspondent Jeffrey Goldberg, who was named as "the most influential journalist/blogger on matters related to Israel,"[43] has said that "It's time to call Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan what he is: a semi-unhinged bigot."[44] Gideon Rachman, the chief foreign affairs commentator for the *Financial Times* joined the group by saying that "I'm beginning to think Erdoğan may actually be quite stupid."[45]

Especially after the anti-government Gezi Park protests in 2013, it has become much more commonplace in the mainstream Western media to call Erdoğan *autocrat*[46] and even *dictator*.[47] There has been a close relationship and even cooperation between domestic anti-government groups and considerable number of authors in the Western media to enhance this representation of Erdoğan.[48] This was followed by the widespread criticisms in the mainstream Western media about the increasing number of AK Party supporters for not seeing the *reality*(!) and "rewarding" Erdoğan for his wrongdoings. In addition, political tactics were provided for Erdoğan's critics to beat him up in the coming elections.[49]

The most basic codes of media ethics have been frequently violated, while Erdoğan-phobia has become an almost unquestionable rule for the mainstream Western media in the post-Gezi era

Gezi Park protests served to introduce Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Western intellectuals as an "Islamist despot" who does not tolerate any opposition.[50] Interestingly, despite allegations against Erdoğan about authoritarianism over Turkish media, the Turkish media itself was filling up with such insults. For instance, Mümtazer Türköne from Fetullah Gülen's *Zaman* daily likened Erdoğan to a "spoilt and talebearer child."[51] Yılmaz Özdil from *Hürriyet* warned Erdoğan by saying, "Nobody would even like to remember you [after your death]. You have no place to sleep [A Turkish idiom used for people who have so many sins that nobody in this world or the afterlife loves him/her]. Riot control vehicles will have to wait upon your grave in order to prevent people from spitting on your grave."[52]

Roni Margulies, the columnist at Gülen's *Taraf* daily and the member of Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party (Turkey), claimed that Prime Minister Erdoğan would be taken to the gallows, as he deserves it.[53] Another journalist Ahmet Şık expressed that "You will see; Erdoğan will either escape or be arrested or become a dictator. He is going for the third option, but this nation will not allow that."[54] Columnist Mümtazer Türköne from *Zaman* daily, the highest circulated newspaper in Turkey, accused Erdoğan of suffering "severe necrophilia."[55] Erdoğan was also being portrayed as a traitor and a tyrant.[56]

James Traub, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *National Review* and *Foreign Affairs*, claimed that Erdoğan was ruling Turkey "by tyranny-of-the-majority."[57] With "his authoritarian style," *Financial Times* argued, "Erdogan is demonstrating to the world that Turkey is a country with a shaky democracy, a flawed constitution and a diminishing number of allies."[58]

Moreover, some journalists did not hesitate to misinform their audiences about what was happening during Gezi Park events. News outlets such as *BBC* and *Russia Today* (RT) prepared live update timelines, which consisted of messages and tweets from protestors and their supporters without checking the authenticity of the information.[59] They preferred to act like notice boards for the messages of demonstrators, while simply ignoring the other side of the story. These media outlets did not show any interest in and chose to ignore when, as a reaction to Taksim protests, hundreds of thousands welcomed Erdoğan with mass rallies in three different cities on June 9, 2013 after his trip to North Africa. The same attitude continued with the mass rally in Istanbul on 16th of

June which was one of the largest, if not the largest, rallies in Turkish history with well over one million participants according to official figures.

Orientalist prejudices prevailed in Western mainstream media during these protests, and "subjective consciousness that prefers secular Turks over pious Turks" dominated their discourse.[60] For instance, anti-government protestors were generally referred to as *people* and *citizens* in media coverage, while AK Party supporters are called by some as Erdoğan's "troops."[61] This sense of elitism that is widely shared by secular Turks in Istanbul is well reflected in the attitude of figures like Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, a professor of international relations at Sabancı University, who complained that the city had "been invaded by Anatolian peasants" who were "uncultured." [62]

Ivan Watson from *CNN* depicted the protests as a result of "culture wars" between pious Muslims and secular urban circles in Turkish society.[63] Usage of the term "urban" for solely seculars is key here, since such a discourse indirectly means that the AK Party supporters are rural. However, this has no base in reality, since AK Party has repeatedly won elections in all major cities including Istanbul and Ankara, with few exceptions like İzmir.

Hugh Pope says that "there's a lot of talk among my Turkish friends of the Gezi Park demonstrations being a turning point."[64] Understanding this situation is key in grasping how a specific type of discourse is generally determining the perceptions of foreign observers. Most of those friends belong to specific sects of political spectrum, mainly Kemalists, Gülen Movement members and Kurdish nationalists. This makes it much more confusing for foreign journalists to fully understand developments in Turkey. The inability of foreign journalists stems from the fact that the majority of Turkish people, who do not have the chance to make friendship with these foreign observers, think and act differently.

Lack of basic knowledge about Turkey, worsens the situation in news coverage of some foreign media outlets. For instance, a TV program named Grand Soir 3 used the Tunisian flag on its screen, instead of the Turkish flag, while covering Taksim protests on *France 3*, the second largest French public television channel.

Conclusion

The Gezi Park protests in 2013 have become a negative turning point in the already worsening quality of foreign media coverage of Turkey and its ruling party. The most basic codes of media ethics (such as impartiality, truthfulness and fairness) have been frequently violated, while Erdoğan-phobia has be-

come an almost unquestionable rule for the mainstream Western media in the post-Gezi era. Provocative messages, including calls for violence, were widely distributed without checking their authenticity during the events. Some well-known representatives of Western media outlets did not hesitate to misinform about what was happening during those protests or to act as active participants of the protests. Some of them even entered into personal arguments with Erdoğan. They did not refrain from committing "grave professional offences" such as "malicious misrepresentation, calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations."[65]

It is neither new nor surprising for media outlets to use their power to influence political developments and to support some political actors against others. It is also very natural for journalists to have their personal positions and opinions about the issues they work on. However, the problem arises when they claim to have the unique position of 'objectivity', while trying to establish a discursive hegemony by silencing all alternative voices in the media. Deliberately providing manipulative/wrong information and the lack of consistency in arguments make things worse, as in cases where Western journalists support the military coup of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, while criticizing Erdoğan's democratic credentials. Or in cases where they show excessive sensitivity about the use of force by police in Turkey, while remaining silent about the police brutality elsewhere in the world. Lack of basic knowledge about the issues they work on and the production of carbon copied shallow analyses also adds to the growing problems of foreign media coverage on Turkey, specifically AK Party and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

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