

## **NUCLEAR ENERGY DISCOURSE IN TURKISH MEDIA\***

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### **Abstract**

Nuclear power plants, viewed as alternative energy resources in energy production, have become a hot topic especially after the disaster having taken place in Chernobyl and Fukushima. Turkey focuses on nuclear power plant construction, trying to decrease her energy dependency on other countries. The discourse about nuclear energy co-exists with the different social actors and their practices as the stakeholders, like governments, opposition parties, industry partners, NGOs, and the locals.

In this study, the reactions about Turkey's first proposed nuclear power plant to be constructed in Akkuyu are dealt with from the context of news discourse. The developments as to the construction of the plant will be analyzed from an integrated perspective called political economy. To that end, the developments experienced between 2010 and 2017 were analyzed from the perspective of five politically differing newspapers, which are Birgün, Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Sabah and Yeni Şafak. Those closely affiliated with the government write in favor of nuclear energy policies whereas the ones in opposition give room to the opposing news and events.

**Keywords:** Nuclear Power Plant, Akkuyu, Cultural Political Economy, Discourse, Newspaper

### *Türkiye Basınında Nükleer Enerji Söylemi*

### **Öz**

Enerji üretiminde önemli bir alternatif olarak görülen nükleer santraller özellikle Rusya'daki Çernobil ve Japonya'daki Fukushima felaketlerinden sonra büyük tartışmalara neden olmuştur. Türkiye de, dışarıya olan enerji bağımlılığını azaltma gerekçesiyle nükleer santral projesi üzerinde durmaktadır. Nükleer enerji söylemi ise hükümetin, muhalefetin, endüstrinin, sivil toplum örgütlerinin ve yöre halkı gibi farklı sosyal aktörlerin pozisyonları ve pratikleriyle birlikte kurulmaktadır.

Çalışmada, Türkiye'deki ilk nükleer santral projesi olan Akkuyu nükleer santraliyle ilgili tepkiler, gazete haber söylemi bağlamında incelenmektedir. Santralin kurulmasına ilişkin gelişmeler bütüncül bir bakış açısı içeren ekonomi politik açıdan ele alınması uygun olmaktadır. Bu amaçla 2010-2017 yılları arasında yaşanan gelişmeler, farklı ideolojik çizgideki beş gazetenin (Birgün, Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, Sabah ve Yeni Şafak) analizi ile ortaya konulmaktadır. Buna göre ideolojik olarak hükümete yakın gazeteler hükümetin nükleer enerji politikasını benimsemiş olarak haber yaparken muhalif olanlar karşıt olaylara ve olgulara yer verdiği görülmektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Nükleer Enerji Santrali, Akkuyu, Kültürel Ekonomi Politik, Söylem, Gazete

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## **Nuclear Energy Discourse in Turkish Media**

### **Introduction**

The power plants providing electricity have led to hot debate after the disasters having taken place in Chernobyl in Russia and Fukushima in Japan. The protests against nuclear power plants held by the locals as well as those arranged by the environmentalists all over the world have given rise to sharp transformations. Many countries either suspended their nuclear energy projects or quit them altogether. However, the rulers of the developing countries keep on relying on nuclear power plants as a solution to the ever-rising energy demands while achieving economic growth.

Similarly, Turkey works on the three nuclear power plants project to justify her decreasing energy dependency. In this study, the first of these projects, namely Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant in Mersin, is analysed. Security risks, environmental issues, destruction of natural beauties, as well as Turkey's geographical position in the earthquake danger zone, have brought about several discussions and protests. While the discussions focus mostly on the disasters caused by the nuclear accidents and the future of nuclear waste, it is also claimed that the needs required by the country would be well met via renewable energy resources. While the locals in Akkuyu in the Mediterranean region wish to preserve the natural beauties and to develop their touristic facilities, they reject having an untested Russian nuclear plant built. The government not only ignores the demands by the locals and environmentalists but also disregards the proposal for referendum by the political parties in opposition. The government blames the main opposition party for not accepting the mega projects leading to the betterment of the country.

As seen, the nuclear power station issue, being affected by the social, economic, technological and cultural factors, can be taken into account from the aspect of political economy with a holistic approach. Thus, Benjamin K. Sovacool and Scott Victor Valentine, who studied about nuclear energy on ten different countries, emphasized that nuclear energy has several symbolic meanings in such fields as popular culture, political protests, agriculture, medicine, modern designs and industry while rejecting institutional

determinism as well as technological determinism and economic reductionism (Sovacool & Valentine, 2012: 8).

The fact that energy is viewed from different actors through varied perspectives and being told to the public inhibits its being clearly perceived by the public in general. There is a discrepancy between the economic picture emerged after the discourses depicted by either governments or the industrial sectors and environmental problems and accidents (Diaz-Maurin & Kovacic, 2015: 207). Costs, insufficiency of the required resources, spoilt soil, water use, nuclear wastes, climatic changes, and misinformation about nuclear energy given to the public prioritize the secret practices in nuclear energy. While the positive aspects of nuclear energy are exaggerated and exalted, its negative aspects or the concerns of the public are hidden, thus leading to empowerment of the nuclear energy proponents (Sovacool & Valentine, 2012: 16).

It is highly significant that all the different views about nuclear energy seen as well as various voices are heard (Desai, 2012, 20). Because the impacts of the decisions taken about the energy politics on society and the time period for these decisions to be put into action could be lengthy and extended. Depending on the different political groups and governments coming to power, diverse decisions might be put into practice. However, consistent energy politics should be under protection (Edberg & Tarasova, 2016: 170). The possible changes to be experienced during the transition from conventional energy to nuclear energy and scientific materials could be simply explained to the public by means of media. Likewise, the role of media in creating a secure atmosphere about nuclear energy by the governments, professionals, and industry is multisided. It is difficult for the media to present information in an unbiased, neutral way, while being pluralist and coherent (Fujigaki, 2015). In practice, since journalism is a sort of filtration and choice, the information and resources upon which the journalists base can affect the public.

Thus, the aim of this study is examine the reactions about the nuclear power plants to be constructed by the government in Turkey from the news discourse, analysing how the environmental opposition is viewed in the press. Discourse analysis is a significant tool in exploiting the changing meanings and developing comments in time about energy while it sheds light on how the general public, experts, politicians, industry and environmentalists perceive the concept of energy.

## **1. Nuclear Energy and Cultural Political Economy**

The main story in nuclear energy is based on technology, science and economy, whereas the energy in question has political, educational, legal, environmental and ethical dimensions. Therefore, this study, as Bob Jessop

(2004:2) stated, will be dealt with a cultural, political economy approach, which combines critical semiotic analysis and the concepts of and tools of critical political economy. “Cultural transformation”, which evolved as a modern post-disciplinary area, into political economy, which emerged as a pre-discipline, requires re-examination of material significance analysis and methodology of political economy (Jessop & Sum, 2001: 90-92). In a sense, this covers cultural political economy, discourse, ideology, identity, discussion, rhetoric, historicism, delusionalism, hermeneutics, interpretation, semiotics, and deconstructivism. Thus, methodically, cultural, political economy not only studies economic and political systems but also does work on ideological and cultural events (Jessop & Sum, 2001: 93). Likewise, Thompson (2013: 74, 76) states that symbolic perspectives ideologically serve for establishing dominant relations and sustaining them. Symbolic forms are defined as any sort of oral or written linguistic phrases or expressions regarded as meaningful structures constructed by subjects, whereas they can be non-linguistic or semi-linguistic combining visual sign or signs. Ideology is related to symbolic structure strategies while functioning and depending upon the symbolic discourses, it can serve to set up domination relations, protecting them or overhauling them (Thompson, 2013: 78). Surely, not all the symbols and strategies are ideological, symbolic forms can only serve being ideological so long as they systematically set up and sustain asymmetrical power relationships (Thompson, 2013:78, 86).

Critical semiotics analysis focuses more on evolutionary and theoretical issues while they vary in social practices (Jessop, 2004: 8). Semioticians partially construct “genres” as a part of social activities, and exist as a ways of being constitutes styles (Fairclough, 2003: 4). Those related to nuclear energy can find rooms in media and different organizations, discourses – on the other hand – can have different forms.

Discourses can overlap with the positions and practices by the governments, opposition parties, industrial sectors, NGOs, locals, etc. Thus, different styles emerge for different actors. Politicians and managers in industries prefer special discourse promoting the legality of nuclear power plants, keeping their common supportive discourse to realize great projects, develop their countries and use smart technologies. All the stories are selected, some arguments are specifically combined and in some circumstances silence is dominant and certain issues are under pressure when all of these are taken into account (Jessop, 2004: 14).

According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989: 1), like in every other political problem, nuclear power has its own culture. It is significant that this culture is built in media. Because the framework/packages formed by the media offer interpretations and meanings related to nuclear power plants including

several discussions. In this study, nuclear energy was analyzed through categories/packages.

## 2. Methods and Techniques

Media functions both as a financial organization and ideological tool. The content of newspapers is closely related to their ownership structure, broadcasting policy, and their strong ties with the ruling political powers (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Aforementioned ideology is the representation of the powers contributing to the establishment, sustainability and change of social relations between powers, independence and exploitation in the world. The news texts, which are produced and disseminated as discourses based on political powers and industrial relations are important in that they give clues about the relations with the ones in power. Within the framework of the economic relations and thus the ideological tendencies of media groups, differed discourses can have either no place or only a little room in media coverage. Therefore, in essence, media present social phenomena through metaphors, sentences, visual images, and certain symbolic devices characterizing the discourse via interpretive categories.

Nuclear energy possesses political and cultural discourse just like in every social phenomenon. Basically, there seem to be connections as to the news on Akkuyu nuclear power plant in the media and the owners of the newspapers– depending on their political ties. Based on the assumption that a series of interpretive categories can be designed as meaningful components to make a topic more meaningful, categories as to nuclear energy have been determined in this study. For this, a quantitative assessment of the most repetitive words / expressions related to nuclear energy was first made and categories were determined on the basis of these data. These categories are analysed in accordance with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and ideological analysis (Thompson, 2013). According to Fairclough (1993), explicit or implicit causality and determinative associations of discursive practices and events are systematically explored on the basis of wider social and cultural structures and processes. Thus, how practices and events have emerged and how they are shaped ideologically by power struggles; reveals that these relationships between discourse and society are a factor that protects itself from power and hegemony (Fairclough, 1993). In other words, the analysis of critical discourse is an analysis at the textual and contextual levels in order to reveal the political meaning of the text. Van Dijk (2000) stated that in critical discourse analysis, there are reciprocal ties between cognition, discourse and society. Van Dijk (1998) defends that he can explain how the ideologies can follow the social actors and the practices in society. While explaining the

ideology in a text, Van Dijk suggests analysing the discourse structures used in a text. Thus, discourse and communication play a central role in forming ideology (Van Dijk, 1989: 24-25). Ideologies are the basic frameworks to organize for social groups, organizations or social cognition shared by the members of the organisations.

Basically, they function as a sort of interface between cognitive representation and discourse and processes beneath actions, on the other hand social status of social groups and their interests. This understanding of ideology enables us to set up the critical links between the analyses by the groups at macro level, social formations and social structure, and settled, individual interactions and actively functioning discourse at micro level (Van Dijk, 1995).

In this study, the answers to the question how the developments regarding the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Turkish newspapers between the year 2010, when the agreement was signed between the Turkish and Russian government and 2017, when this study was initiated have been tried to be given. To that end, selections were made depending on the ideological stances of the newspapers; *BirGün* (leftist), *Cumhuriyet* (social democrat and secular), *Hürriyet* (liberal and secular), *Sabah* (central rightist), and *Yeni Şafak* (Islamist). The news, columns, comments taken in these newspapers during the aforementioned years were analysed.

### **3. The Findings: *Presentation and Major Themes***

Between the years 2010-2017, it is seen that there are 295 news in *Birgün* about this topic (Table: 1). *Birgün* informs its readers about the background information with expert opinions in the news discourse. In the news discourse, which presents the scientific reports and reasons opposing the construction of a nuclear power plant in Akkuyu, the discourse of the government/ruling party is specifically criticized (*Birgün*, 2011, March 18). The discourse is based on the following premises; the bid for the nuclear power plant was allegedly illegal; the technology of the Russians is not convenient; the nuclear power station generated energy would not be beneficial as asserted, irrecoverable damage could be experienced in case of nuclear leakage or debris, and more importantly the place where the power plant will be constructed is situated in an earthquake zone. Similarly, the newspaper, (*Birgün*, 2011, April 18), which gives place to the democratic reactions, marching, protests, etc. of the locals, aims at ensuring the visibility of the NGOs and neighbouring communities, opposition parties.

**Table 1.** The Number of News about Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant

Newspaper/Type	News	Columns	Interviews	Essays	Total (N)
<i>Birgün</i>	224	58	6	7	<b>295</b>
<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	279	74	1	15	<b>369</b>
<i>Hürriyet</i>	564	94	1	-	<b>659</b>
<i>Sabah</i>	316	29	3	-	<b>348</b>
<i>Yeni Şafak</i>	226	-	-	-	<b>226</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1609</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1897</b>

When we look at the 396 pieces of writings, including news, columns, interviews and essays, taking place in *Cumhuriyet*, most of the content seems to be adverse. While the Mediterranean region is claimed to be turned into a nuclear dumping ground, the views of the environmentalists and NGOs are given rooms, calling out for the government to withdraw. Other issues debated are as follows; the project was submitted to Russia without a call for tender bid, legal arbitrary authority for disagreements was decided to be the international courts rather than the Turkish courts. Almost all the columnists are against nuclear energy.

*Hürriyet* gives room for 659 pieces of news, most of which are the news on nuclear energy, while some are based on the reactions, others presenting some positive sides of the issue, like possible employment options, education facilities, etc. Apart from the protests against nuclear plants, *Hürriyet* draws its readers' attention to the negative aspects of constructing a nuclear power plant in Akkuyu (*Hürriyet*, 2012, June 6). Majority of the columnists criticized the issue from environmentalist aspects, giving details about destruction of nature, human rights and democracy. It was also enquired that other renewable alternative energy resources like solar panels and wind turbines could be tried.

*Sabah* published 348 pieces of news about the positive effects of nuclear power plants for Turkey. While the proposed power plant is said to become an example for the world – hitting the headlines through the words of the prime minister, the capital to be transferred to Turkey, employment to be granted, education on nuclear energy to be offered for the young university students, and technology transfer to be brought up were exploited. The columnists, like their support in the other political issues, also give support for nuclear energy. Some columnists, however, were hesitant about the nuclear wastes and the Russians, yet cannot directly oppose the overall idea.

The writings about the Akkuyu nuclear power plant in *Yeni Şafak's* web page were only followed until 2014. When 226 pieces of news were analysed,

*Yeni Şafak*, just like *Sabah*, used a positive discourse and gave the news in a routine series of incidents.

In the news, energy independency, requirement for nuclear energy, and “mega projects” of Turkey are prioritized (*Yeni Şafak*, 2015, November 10; 2016, August 15; 2016, November 29). On the other hand, *Yeni Şafak* did not give room for worrying scientific views and criticisms about nuclear energy, the ideas of the opposition parties and NGOs.

#### 4. News Resources and Categories by the Discourse of the Actors

In terms of news contents, while the pro-government newspapers, like *Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak* and *Hürriyet* give room for the views of the government officials and opposition parties, *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* mostly promoted the news by the opposition parties, NGOs, chambers, and environmentalists (see; Table 2). Furthermore, *Sabah*, *Yeni Şafak* and *Hürriyet* used the Russian authorities as their resources; they did not care much about the views of the environmentalist NGOs, and locals’ voices. This, therefore, led to quantitative domination of the political power, business world, and company officials.

**Table 2.** Use of Resources in the News

News Resources	<i>Birgün</i>	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	<i>Hürriyet</i>	<i>Sabah</i>	<i>Yeni Şafak</i>	Total
PM	10	5	25	42	11	93
President	12	15	70	45	39	181
Government and Offices	20	22	45	35	22	144
Ministries	51	42	60	105	36	294
Russian Authorities and Akkuyu NGS Production	54	65	123	200	75	517
Mersin Governor’s Office and Manucipality	-	12	25	8	1	46
Independent Experts and Energy Associations	46	33	52	12	16	159
Business	7	16	63	53	17	156
Locals	13	27	6	4	1	51
Opposition Parties	51	52	56	15	1	175



Chambers	59	27	35	5	-	126
NGOs	126	86	53	13	4	282
Trade Unions	17	2	8			27
Total	466	404	621	537	223	

## 5. News Discourse as Growth and Energy Independency

Nuclear energy has usually been supported by the president, PM, ministers, members of government and state officials (see; Table 3). Newspapers, like *Sabah*, *Hürriyet* and *Yeni Şafak* set up their discourse via that of actors. The minister of energy, Taner Yıldız, said, “construction of nuclear energy plants is as important as that of electricity generation for the development of industry and technological progress” (*Sabah*, 2011, December 15), while in another talk, he claimed “it is a “leap-frogging” for Turkey’ level in terms of industrialization (*Sabah*, 2011, December 15) and Turkey is pushing her limits (*Hürriyet*, 2010, December 16). Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during his office in prime ministry, emphasized (*Sabah*, 2011, March 16) that Akkuyu power plant would become an example for the world, and during his presidency, he said “it is a crucial project for Turkey (*Sabah*, 2016, November 24). A scientist claimed that Akkuyu and Sinop are the two biggest entrepreneurship during the course of Turkey (*Sabah*, 2016, April 22), another scholar stated that there will not be any tsunami risks in the proposed area for the plant, and money will remain in Turkey if we produce our own energy (*Hürriyet*, 2011, November 2). Likewise, nuclear energy is claimed to be crucial by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources again in that it bears significance for the realization of energy security and reduction in imported energy dependency and current deficit (*Sabah*, 2012, February 29) while nuclear energy power plants were included into the list of “mega projects” of Turkey, thus making Turkey in the top three in the league of projects. (*Sabah*, 2012, December 8). Russian president said that Turkey (*Sabah*, 2012, December 4) would be a hub for energy. *Sabah*, referring to a report it cited, claimed, “Turkey will desperately be in need of nuclear energy in 2023, when the energy demand becomes 450 billion KWh. (*Sabah*, 2015, October 21).

**Table 3.** Categorical Word Choices in Newspapers and Discourse

	Categories	Relevant Concepts	<i>Birgün</i>	<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	<i>Hürriyet</i>	<i>Sabah</i>	<i>Yeni Şafak</i>	Total (N)
1	Discourse in the news on Growth and Energy Independence	Progress, Development, Growth, Modernization, Welfare	8	5	33	9	40	95
		Energy Independency / International Dependency	20	9	40	10	11	90
		Russia's great authority	27	33	23	1	4	88
		High Costs	45	20	21	1	2	89
2	Public Responsibility	Public Responsibility	85	31	39	12	4	171
3	International nuclear lobbies	International nuclear lobbies	18	9	16	1	0	44
4	Environmental Pollution ÇED Report and Referendum	Environmental Sensitiveness and referendum	145	201	139	46	2	533
		Tsunami/ Chernobyl Radiation / Radioactive Nuclear wastes / Pollution / Cooling	255	230	344	148	45	1022
		Technology to be employed in Akkuyu is the first in its field	35	19	23	1	0	78
		Bid / without bidding / Legislations about bidding Constitution / Arbitration / ÇED report / confidential reports	180	166	285	71	68	770
5	Turkey in the Quake Zone	Turkey in the Quake Zone	72	61	113	91	22	359
6	Discourse on the Employment Opportunities in nuclear plants	Employment / Workforce / Education	34	22	166	120	156	498
7	Social Movements: Public Stance	Meetings and protest against nuclear plants	206	134	133	52	13	538
	<b>Total</b>		<b>1130</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>1375</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>4375</b>

*Yeni Şafak*, defines Akkuyu nuclear power plant as “mega projects” - making Turkey step into a new age for Turkey’s political power party (Justice and Development Party/AKP )” (*Yeni Şafak*, 2015 December 25; 2015, November 10). *Yeni Şafak* bases its claims for constructing nuclear plants on”

increasing demand for energy independency of Turkey, and the pricy costs of other energy methods”. Vice undersecretary for the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources Necati Yamaç, explains that 98% of natural gas and 92% petroleum are being imported to meet the energy demands of Turkey, thus being in need of a nuclear plant. (*Yeni Şafak*, 2016, March 9). Besides, since Turkey has been growing with a performance higher than the world’s average in the last 14 years, which, in return, means another 6-8% energy demand (*Yeni Şafak*, 2016, January 28; 2016, October 10; 2016, November 29).

The same approach for the increasing energy demand to meet the ever-increasing growth of Turkey is also adopted by *Hürriyet* newspaper likewise the political powers in control. (*Hürriyet*, 2015, April 9; 2016, November 7). On the other hand, the same newspaper gives the contradictory headlines that “the Turkish public is misinformed about the nuclear plants in that Turkey will be saved from energy dependency after constructing nuclear plants – based on the figures given by “Chamber of Electrical Engineers/ EMO” and thus being manipulated” (*Hürriyet*, 2015, March 27). Yet, this criticism is forwarded as an ambiguous discourse in the eyes of its readers by using the term “it was claimed/alleged that ...”.

Despite the misconceptions forwarded by the official statements that through nuclear energy power plants Turkey will reduce its energy dependency, NGOs, opposition parties, environmentalists, and anti-nuclear chambers, like Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects/TMMOB, claimed that Akkuyu plant would increase Turkey dependency rather than reducing it. *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet* give room for the discourse of these resources in their cover pages. Likewise, the chairman of the Chambers of Mechanical Engineers, affiliated with TMMOB, stated that the initial cost-effectiveness of nuclear power plants is highly expensive, taking 8-15 years to repay as well as bringing more dependency in terms of its technology and fuel. EMO and TMMOB applied for abolishment of the misinforming commercials about nuclear plants on TV and demanded sanctions against the advertising company. (*Cumhuriyet*, 2015, March 27).

Political party in power and businessmen support their claims on the premise that “country’s independency for energy” while arguing for nuclear plants constructions. *Birgün* gives room for the reports prepared by the energy experts, scientists and NGOs, forming an opposition for the discourse of the party in power. Moreover, it claims that via Akkuyu nuclear plant project, Turkey’s dependency on Russia will increase. *Birgün* also asserts that with the construction of Akkuyu power plant, only a 370 Kwh energy would be contributed in total by referring to the experts in the field. In order not to be dependent on energy, the dependency story is unreal, they emphasized. (*Birgün*, 2011, April 17; 2014, April 10; 2016, July 11). On the other hand, *Birgün*, by

citing from the foreign experts, puts forward that Turkey can opt for more cost-effective alternative energies like stronger solar power or higher wind power capacity compared to Germany and can easily shift into these alternative resources. (*Birgün*, 2016, March 4).

## 6. Public Responsibility

The newspapers like *Birgün*, *Hürriyet* and *Cumhuriyet* focus on the term, “public responsibility” by reporting news about the nuclear power stations. *Birgün* constructs a discourse around critical news based on the harmful activities for the environment by the greedy capitalists for more interests. As a result of globalisation, *Birgün*, asserts that international capitalist powers exploit the country’s underground and natural resources by opening up commercial organisations without caring for the benefit or betterment of the country (see: TMMOB, Confederation of Public Employees Trade Union/ KESK, Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey/ DİSK) to decrease energy dependency (*Birgün*, 2010, June 28). İTO (İstanbul Chamber of Commerce) İstanbul chairman, said *Birgün*, claimed that energy is the second most high-ranking sector in the world which brings lucrative money, thus blinding people on purpose to earn more (*Birgün*, 2011, March 18).

According to the results by the study conducted by A&G Research – Survey Company on behalf of Greenpeace, if a referendum is to be held, the opinion polls showed that Turkish public would go for “No” on nuclear power plant construction with 64% vote, whereas it would go up to 70% in Mersin. (*Hürriyet*, 2011, April 29). However, Turkish and Russian authorities alike claim the opposite despite the general concern amidst Turkish public. The Energy minister talks about the firm stance of Turkey as to the ever-increasing energy demands of the growing country by stating in one of his public speeches that “remaining single is of a bigger threat than nuclear power plants!” (*Hürriyet*, 2011, April 6). Yet, the PM, Erdogan, claimed that gas tanks in the kitchens are of bigger risks compared to the petrol pipelines cutting through the lands (2011, March 16). The general director of the energy company, who focused on the possible benefits and facilities to gain in the future, claimed that they took every measure and precaution to protect the Akkuyu power plant against any possible risks or accidents for any unpredictable malpractice, stating publicly that it is even resistant to plane crashes (*Hürriyet*, 2011, April 18). “We would hide nothing from the public” said the Russian director general, informing that they would immediately cease working in case of emergency or “insecure” incidents (*Hürriyet*, 2011, May 25).

*Hürriyet* asserts that in the contract signed by the Russian company, there are many points against the benefits of Turkish public to be reconsidered,

“Societies always seek for a culprit in case of emergencies, and like to see the state in the frontline”, wrote Cengiz Yalçın (2014, May 17) with his statement to draw public attention. Similar concerns are uttered by the columnists in *Hürriyet*, too.

## 7. International Nuclear Lobbies

The opposing newspapers like *Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet*, usually give place to the ideas and explanations forwarded by the major opposition party, Republican People’s Party/CHP, and NGOs about their views on the lobbies working for nuclear interests. It is suggested that the obsolete technologies of the nuclear plants today are transferred to the developing countries by the energy lobbies, thus making them more dependent on the developed countries, and also rising their incomes. A columnist explained that the globally influential energy lobbies tried to hide the Fukushima disaster from the public eye, yet after revealing the truth by the Guardian, people were confronted with realities.<sup>1</sup> Another columnist says that the international energy lobbyists openly tell lies in TV programs, stating that Germany deconstructed the old former nuclear power plants and planned to replace them with the newer and safer ones, which he sees no harm in such white lies (Hüseyin Taş, 2011, December 5). However, energy politics should be based on and designed by the voices of people, said TMMOB (*Birgün*, 2011, March 18).

*Birgün* gives room to the discourses by the major opposition party, CHP, and along with TMMOB and other NGOs, about the international lobbies over the realisation of nuclear power plants. CHP Mersin Deputy, draws public attention to the political pressure by the nuclear lobbies over the government as a result of the neo-liberal policies dictated by imperialistic powers despite the scientific reactions for 40 years (*Birgün*, 2010, August 10). Same newspaper states that though there is no built-operate-transfer model for the nuclear plants, the facilities are offered to the lobbies on a silver plate by guaranteeing that nuclear electricity will be bought by the government at high stakes (*Birgün*,

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1 According to the information the Guardian got, the British government tried to find ways to soothe the reactions against nuclear plants after the Fukushima accident, they wanted to devise ways to underestimate the impact. The correspondence revealed that the government agencies and energy departments plot behind the curtains with the giant energy moguls like Area and EDF Energy to block the reactions which may arise after the new generation reactors are to be constructed in England to be commenced soon after the crisis in Japan.(Serdar Kızak, 2011, July 5).

2011, May 1; 2011, March 15). Based completely on the political preferences, and in return, we are informed that the old former technologies are bought from the nuclear lobbyists, thus countries are made more energy dependent (*Birgün*, 2011, April 8; 2010, June 28; 2012, March 13).

Opposite to *Birgün*, *Yeni Şafak* claims that there are other lobbies in the world, who are against constructing nuclear power plants in Turkey. With the discourse raised, *Yeni Şafak* claims that "... those who want to plot against us resist the power station in Akkuyu, asserting that a series of projects are inhibited like the transfer of the natural gas over Turkey in East Mediterranean (*Yeni Şafak*, 2015, June 1; 2016, August 4). They comment that *Hürriyet* reveals all the secrets about Akkuyu to the world, claiming that this was the first step of an international operation against Turkey (*Yeni Şafak*, 2015, June 1).

President Erdogan turns the debates on nuclear energy into a discourse plotted against Turkey whenever there are projects related to coal-powered plants or nuclear plants, all of which are tried to be inhibited by the outsiders, wrote *Hürriyet*, quoting the president's words on criticism in newspapers about the nuclear power plant construction projects (2016, November 7).

## 8. Turkey in Earthquake Zone

Earthquake news always took place in Turkish press. After Fukushima disaster, the debates on constructing power plants in quake zones became hotter like in the countries which are on the dangerous zones. Akkuyu's being close to the Eceemis fault line was regarded as a red thin line mostly by the opposing parties and scientists alike. Many people and parties in opposition in many countries give up nuclear energy, but they were curious about why Turkey ventured for this. The former prime minister said that it is resistant to quakes at magnitude 9 and asked why we cannot build such plants just because of natural risks? (*Hürriyet*, 2011, March 17). The Russian director of the proposed plant in Akkuyu stated that the plant would be resistant to high risk of tsunamis and earthquakes with the magnitude of 9. The seismic security of the plant would be higher than that of Fukushima, he said (*Hürriyet*, 2011, April 18).

*Birgün* comes up with justification against building nuclear power plant in Akkuyu. One of these is that there are scientific evidence that the region is an earthquake zone. For instance, *Birgün* cites the explanations of the Büyükeceli municipality, where the plant is proposed to be built, as a reference given by the scientists and representatives of TMMOB (*Birgün*, 2010, March 23; 2010, August 5; 2015, May 4; 2016, December 5).

*Yeni Şafak*, however, opposes the risk claims in the Akkuyu region by referring to the Russian company's ideas and views as well as a couple of expert opinions (*Yeni Şafak*, 2014, December 2). Russian authorities said; “we had the moral of the story after Fukushima. We are taking stricter measures now; not only against stronger disasters but also against concurrent events like these”, which are exploited by certain Turkish media (*Yeni Şafak*, 2014, November 29; 2014, November 9). *Yeni Şafak* claimed that in Fukushima and Chernobyl accidents, there were unique reasons and then claimed that Akkuyu region is in the least risky zone in terms of quake risk analyses. The technology to be employed here would have more security measures and be equipped with 50 yearlong reactor life, said in the news as a soothing herald (*Yeni Şafak*, 2016, November 29).

## 9. Environmental Pollution, ÇED Report and Referendum

That the government initiated the project without taking the consent of the general public opinion was criticized by the opposition parties and environmentalists. Referendum decision was offered, and public will was sought for the destiny of the general public. A scientist said that referendum was compulsory in Russia 1993 Constitution for nuclear plants and no nuclear plants have been built in his country now. Apart from Russia, in Sweden, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, referendums were held and they decided not to build nuclear plants there (Ülkü Azrak, 2011, March 28). Referendum, as a subject, took place in opposing media and mainstream newspaper *Hürriyet* as well, yet they found no place in pro-government newspapers, like *Sabah* and *Yeni Şafak* at all.

The topics like environment, pollution, ÇED (Environmental Impact Assessment) reports, tsunami, radioactive wastes, cooling technologies which are important for the locals and for the region took place in the press from different perspectives. After finding lacking information in the ÇED reports by the Russian company, the revised version of the report was attested by the ministry of environment and tourism, yet was sued for abolishment by the NGOs and some green activists due to the persistent deficiencies. First, it was stated to be beyond scientific criteria and away with ÇED formats. The risks were given place in the opposing media (*Birgün* and *Cumhuriyet*) and mainstream newspaper *Hürriyet*; a non-experimental technology in Akkuyu, correct choice of place, a former version of this plant's being unsuccessful in India, destruction of main pumps in Iran during trial experiments, the legal irresponsibility of the company in case of accidents, transformation of the wastes to Russia through waterways in the Straits were all debated in the

meantime. The illegal commencement of the construction without taking ÇED reports was also criticized. A scientist also stated that the radioactive release in the ÇED inventory had also misleading data. The same scientist also claimed that, despite the general conception, though no incidents may have been experienced, these plants emit isotopes – detrimental to human and nature (Hayrettin Kılıç, *Cumhuriyet*, 2015, January 13). However, in the pro-government media, it was claimed “Those living near the Akkuyu plant for one year are exposed to the radiation 1100 times higher than tomography beams”, taking place in the ÇED report. Similarly, the sentences, like: “the power plant will liven up the economy and be based on the environmental criteria” and “wastes will be deported to Russia” took place in the pro-government press (*Sabah*, 2014, June 18). In the same newspaper again, a diminutive language was used for the wastes: All the nuclear wastes in 40 years can be buried in four football pitches only, they said (2012, February 29). The cabinet extended the coverage of the nuclear plants into the category of ‘strategic enterprises’ and exempted these companies off the licensing procedures and ÇED-like processes (*Hürriyet*, 2016, October 11).

*Yeni Şafak* presents the debatable ÇED report process as smooth and normal process. For example, the relevant ministry approved the report on the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (NGS) and Environmental Impact Assessment Report (ÇED). It was evaluated by 56 different institutions and departments and presented to the public opinion after the commission’s work” (*Yeni Şafak*, 2014, November 9; 2014, December 2; 2016, May 1), took place in the newspapers. *Birgün* presents these in its cover pages: High Court’s decision on abolishment of the exemption of ÇED in 2011, exclusion of the great projects by the government in the stature enacted in 2015, and also the exclusion of the projects beyond ÇED by the Supreme Court. *Birgün* bases its criticisms on the discourse by TMMOB, scientists, and opposition party’s expressions. It also stated that the political party in power signed an international agreement with the Russians despite the rejections (*Birgün*, 2011, May 19) by the High Court or the Supreme Court by bypassing the legislature, making all of these practices illegal in essence (*Birgün*, 2012, June 4; 2016, July 12).

*Birgün* focused on the views of the locals living in Akkuyu on nuclear plants and thus taking stance for their active participation. For example, a hotel owner says that he is against building a nuclear power plant in Akkuyu since the region already contributes to the country via tourism incomes (*Birgün*, 2010, August 10). *Birgün* helps reflect the ideas of the locals in the media. *Birgün* displays the group of people’s ideas established against the construction of nuclear plants through expressing this view “The environmentalists took a common decision to fight against the exploitation moulded by the abuse of



nature and human created in hands with the world’s imperialistic and capitalist co-conspirators”(Birgün, 2010, March 26).

*Birgün* emphasizes the importance of sensitivity on environment by allowing headlines as its discourse, like “Turkey is turning into a garbage dump”(Birgün, 2010, April 7). They elaborate on the nuclear accidents like the ones seen in Chernobyl and Fukushima, giving examples on the hazards over nature and men. Birgün frequently uses motto-like expressions; “Don’t forget Chernobyl, Protect Mersin!” or “Mersin will not turn into a nuclear garbage dump!” (2010, March 25), or “After the accidents in Chernobyl and Fukushima, all the world took lessons, leaving nuclear energy projects and investments – initiated by Germany!” (Birgün, 2011, June 4).

## **10. Discourse on Nuclear Power Plants and Employment Opportunities**

The mutual contract on Nuclear Power Plant signed between Russia and Turkey in 2010 also covers educational activities. Within the framework of the project, Turkish students were sent to Russia to receive education on nuclear facilities. After the completion of their education, the Turkish students elected were planned to be employed in the Akkuyu Nuclear plant. Depending upon their status, the candidates were expected to have jobs, health insurance, lodging, which is frequently mentioned by the newspapers, *Sabah* and *Yeni Şafak*, since 2010 in almost every year. The headlines are enthusiastically presented for the employability and education opportunities for the people. “Record application for nuclear education: 5700 candidates!” (2014, April 13); “The young to change Turkey into a nuclear power!” (2014, May 28); “Nuclear Rush!” (2011, July 2); “300 Turkish nuclear energy trainings!” (2011, June 18). The employment opportunities brought up by the nuclear power plants were given place in the headlines too: “10b Dollar Jobs in Nuclear for Turks!” (2012, July 15); “Rush for high salary!” (2013, September 17); “More Turkish firms for nuclear plants” (2014, March 3); “Turkish businessmen might have a role in nuclear plants construction” (2016, October 25).

The recruitment and educational possibilities could not find much place in the opposing newspapers or just being rejected as a piece of news. In fact, recruitment of Turkish citizens in the nuclear plants was just uttered in the “mutual” contract, yet the Turkish government made a promise that more foreigners can be recruited in such facilities and required amendments will be granted for that purpose without any specified quota, stated EMO. (*Cumhuriyet*, 2010, July 2).

Similarly, in the news in *Cumhuriyet* dated 16 July 2010, the headline was: “Nuclear divided the residents in Gülnarlı into two!” Those who voted “yes” for the nuclear plant will be offered more employment opportunities and their needs will be met via the job opportunities that were created specifically for them. However, in the same news, those who say “no” emphasized on risks, pollution, agriculture, negatively affected tourism. In news related to education, *Hürriyet*, a mainstream newspaper, focused on the issue as well. Though the news was not as positive as those in *Sabah*, the news was mostly positive or even neutral/informational. In one of the news, the ideas of the students receiving education in Russia were asked. In the news headlined, “Nuclear Turks” in the newspaper, all the students said they favors nuclear energy and defend this type of energy. (2012, April 5). The only negative thing in the newspaper about the students in Russia was that students went astray there instead of studying (2012, October 14).The possible but limited employment options were given a place there too.

## 11. Social Movements: Public Stance

*Yeni Şafak* used a discourse with a negative tone about social movements related to the local people who are against the nuclear plants, green activists, meetings held by the political parties against Akkuyu plant. For example, a group of people who protested against the inauguration ceremony for the Akkuyu plant obstructed the entrance gates in the construction site. The group, claiming to be green activists, kept hostages from the journalists and guests, upon which the police intervened (*Yeni Şafak*, 2015, April 14). Berat Albayrak, the minister of energy and natural resources, reminding those who are against nuclear energy plants, said: “If you are concerned about environment, for the world, do not bother to look at Armenia, you will see Metsamor nuclear power plant there, just 20 kilometers away from our border”( *Yeni Şafak*, 2016, April 28), which reminded people of the anti-environmentalist expressions and Akkuyu plant.

*Birgün* gives an integrated picture about the social movements related to Akkuyu plant, like meetings, reactions, resistance, people’s will, etc through a constant discourse. The newspaper, which gave place to the discourse of the relevant actors (like chambers and locals), frames their goals based on financial interests without taking the interests of the public, and without analysing the required scientific analyses, and they focus on the public opinions and power plants that could give harm to the environment (*Birgün*, 2012, March 29). The two examples; “Thousands of citizens marching to protest Akkuyu power plant!” (*Birgün*, 2010, March 25; 2014, December 3) and “submitting 170.000

signatures to the congress by the activists” (*Birgün*, 2010, July 7) express that the counter-arguments can be stated in a democratic way.

The newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, supported any counter-arguments and protests of the environmentalists, chambers, NGOs, parties in opposition, some local citizen, experts, artists, and columnists. The fact that the protestors gave support to victims, or protested for the anniversary of Chernobyl as well as got assistance from “the greens” in Germany and also from other activists were all turned into news. The call for protesting the nuclear energy plants by the deputies of Turkish origin in Germany took place in the newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, on March 16, 2011. The newspaper generally employed striking headlines like; “Smelling Russian dominion!” (2010, July 14) “No to Nuclear Garbage!” (2011, August 8); “Don’t let Akkuyu die!” (2011, March 16), “Great protest in Akkuyu” (2012, August 4); “Appeal for Akkuyu!” (2013, July 16); “Consent for destruction when Putin is on the way!” (2014, December 1); “Fight for Environment!” (2015, April 20); “Top secret in the nuclear plants!” (2015, June 7); “Atıcı from CHP: Mersin will die!” (2016, July 13). *Hürriyet* also gave room to the reactions, even carried out a survey on nuclear plants and concluded that 64% of the subjects were against the power plants and this ratio rocketed in the CHP electorate, reaching up to 86%, which was expressed by the columnist, Yalçın Doğan (2011, April 30). Interestingly, *Hürriyet* hit the headlines after writing publicly about the confidential report prepared by the International Atom Energy Agency, yet was hidden from the Turkish public, leading to hot debates and discussions in the media (2015, June 1). In the report, the public was informed that the documents and information as to the Akkuyu nuclear power plant was systematically hidden from the Turkish public and also even from the Turkish legal courts, giving information that Turkish government did not have any contingency plan for nuclear wastes and closure of the nuclear facilities with no proper national policy and strategy. In reaction to this, *Sabah* put forward the statement by the minister with the headline; “Lies about Secret by *Hürriyet*”.

## Conclusion

When we analyze the news about the proposed nuclear power plant in Akkuyu in Turkey, we can easily see that polarization seen in the media has become dominant in this field, too. While the pro-government make headlines about nuclear power plants with an adopted discourse, the ones in opposition give room for the opposing ideas and incidents. The members of the government, on the other hand, in particular the minister of energy, stated that all the developed countries have nuclear power plants and Turkey would be no

different, thus suggesting that there is a sort of universalization from the nuclear point of view!

When the defined categories are taken into account from this perspective, it would be observed that public responsibility was shared by mostly newspapers in opposition and by the mainstream newspapers, yet this issue was totally ignored by the pro-government newspapers. In fact, the most basic duty of newspapers is to inform the public about the possible hazards that might affect the society in the first place. Likewise, representing the social reactions in the press and using the press as a sort of forum for the discussions having taken place in the public. Thus, it is highly significant that while the opposing or mainstream newspapers focus on the stance of the society on the nuclear plants, the pro-government newspapers pretend not to see these social reactions.

The fact that Turkey is placed in the earthquake zone was put forward more strongly after the nuclear accident in Fukushima, the anti-nuclear groups seem to have gotten more ground. However, the government and the Russian company – which will construct and run the nuclear power plant clearly showed that they did not retreat from constructing a nuclear power plant in Turkey and this was also shared in the pro-government newspapers. The deficiencies in the ÇED report, yet the amendments made by the government to void them and the cases sued against the government did not find a room in the opposing media. In this sense, censoring the other is followed as a strategy. Similarly, wastes, radiation, radioactivity and isotopes – which would sustain for ages and go on giving harm to people and nature have all been neglected.

In the study, it was attempted to reveal the changing and developing interpretations and meanings of nuclear energy with discourse analysis. In this regard, the general public, experts, politicians, industry and environmentalists have been assessed by their press statements on how they perceive nuclear energy and their views have been covered as far as they were given on the newspapers. As the framing and method of study is designed in this way, in a sense it is also a limitation. For this reason, in-depth interviews with different groups of nuclear energy to reach more broadly the views on nuclear energy could provide guidance for future work. While all aspects of nuclear energy are seen and the sound of different voices is important, negotiations with local residents, especially those affected by the nuclear power plant, will be of great contribution. This contribution is thought to be an important tool for the second and third nuclear power plants planned to be constructed later.

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