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Framing the Russian Aircraft Crisis: News Discourse in Turkey's Polarized Media Environment

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the way in which the downing of a Russian aircraft by a Turkish F-16 jet on 24 November 2015 was framed by pro-government (*Türkiye, Yeni Akit, Yeni Şafak*) and anti-government (*Cumhuriyet*) newspapers. Framing means selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text. News frames give us definitions and identify those responsible for an event; make moral judgements; and propose solutions to problems. The analysis of the news frames utilized by four newspapers underlines the fact that in a polarized media environment news frames are highly politicized and the distinction between news frames and official discourse is frequently blurred.

Keywords: Russia, Turkey, Crisis, Framing, News Media, Polarization.

Rusya Uçak Krizini Çerçevelemek: Türkiye'nin Kutuplaşmış Medya Ortamında Haber Söylemi

ÖZET

Bu makale Rus savaş uçağının 24 Kasım 2015 tarihinde Türk F16'ları tarafından düşürülüşünün hükümet yanlısı (*Türkiye, Yeni Akit, Yeni Şafak*) ve hükümet karşıtı (*Cumhuriyet*) gazeteler tarafından nasıl çerçevelendiğini incelemektedir. Çerçeveleme, algılanan gerçekliğin bazı yönlerini seçerek onları iletişim metni içerisinde daha belirgin kılma anlamına gelir. Haber çerçeveleri bize belirli bir olayın nasıl tanımlandığı ve sorumlularının kim olduğu hakkında bilgi verir; ahlaki değer yargılarına dayanır ve sorunların çözümüne yönelik çözüm önerileri sunar. Bahsi geçen dört gazetenin haber çerçeveleri, kutuplaşmış bir medya ortamında haber çerçevelerinin de son derece politikleştiğini ve haber çerçeveleri ile resmi söylem arasındaki sınırların çoğunlukla bulanıklaştığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Rusya, Türkiye, Kriz, Çerçeveleme, Haber Medyası, Kutuplaşma.

Introduction

The downing of a Russian aircraft by a Turkish F-16 jet on 24 November 2015 was a benchmark in Turkish Russian relations, which were smooth on the surface for most of the 2000s. Evoking great political, economic and strategic consequences, the crisis between the two countries became an issue of great domestic importance. For a relatively long period, the Russian plane crisis became one of the most burning issues on the agenda. However, as a result of the overly politicized and polarized condition of Turkey's media landscape, outlets with different ideological and political alignments presented exceedingly different interpretations of the event.

This study takes an important international relations issue, namely the downing of a Russian warplane as an example. The pro-government newspapers are *Türkiye*, *Yeni Şafak* and *Yeni Akit*. As a critical voice, *Cumhuriyet* is selected to underline the differences between pro-government and anti-government positions regarding the Russian airplane crisis.

Framing is the approach used in this research. The main objective of the study is to show how the news frames, in more polarized and less free media environments, tend to follow and to be directed by the way events are framed by political actors and dominant political discourses. The second objective is to show the extent of differences in news frames between pro- and anti-government news outlets; as well as amongst the pro-government newspapers.

Framing Theory and Research

Framing theory has its roots and applications in many disciplines including psychology, sociology, politics, and communication studies. In sociology, Hedier's experiments showed how human beings construct simplified and categorized judgements and causal attributions in processing the complex data they come across in their daily lives.¹ And in psychology, Kahneman and Tversky's theory examined how different presentations of choices may result in varying decisions and evaluations of options.² Goffman used the term "primary frameworks" which refer to "relatively stable and socially shared category systems that human beings use to classify new information".³ He described framing as "the process of observing and making sense of events."⁴ Goffman argued that every person applies his or her own values and perspectives, or frames of reference to the interpretation of new events or occurrences.

In communication studies, framing analysis provides researchers with a rich theoretical framework for studying news items. In the framing model, the media's selectivity gains importance. Framing is defined as "the activities of the mass media as they select, emphasize and present some aspects of 'reality' to audiences, while ignoring others."⁵ Although there is no clear definition of the term or a unified research program, framing is about selection and salience. In Entman's frequently quoted words, "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a

1 David Tewksbury and Dietram A. Scheufele, "News Framing Theory and Research", B. Jennings and M. B. Oliver (Ed.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, Routledge, New York and London, 2009, p.18.

2 Dietram A. Scheufele and David Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models", *Journal of Communication*, Vol.57, No.1, p.11.

3 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1986, p.27; Tewksbury and Scheufele, "News Framing", p.18.

4 Ibid., p.277.

5 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1972, p.277.

communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.⁶

In her analysis of news making processes, Tuchmann reported that news, through its frame, informs people about themselves and others. She concluded, “news is perpetually defining and redefining, constituting and reconstituting social phenomena.”⁷ Tewksbury and Scheufele notes that frames invite people to think about issues and events in certain ways: “frames are the devices that build associations between concepts; information in a news story can cement the link, but it relies on a frame to build the associations.”⁸ Reporters, when covering the news for print and broadcast media, use news frames. These news frames may be themes or styles that are used to attract audiences, and directly or indirectly affect their evaluation of the issues. From this aspect, news frames present specific perspectives or points of view.⁹ Pan and Kosicki’s brief description highlights the relationship between framing and news discourse as:

We may conceive a news media frame as a cognitive device used in information encoding, interpreting, and retrieving; it is communicable; and it is related to journalistic professional routines and conventions. Framing, therefore, may be studied as a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse or as a characteristic of the discourse itself.¹⁰

Researchers have found that news frames affect the audiences’ interpretation of news. Framing theory proceeds from the assumption that there is a relationship between how an issue is characterized in news reports and how it is understood by audiences.¹¹ Selectivity in the news coverage frames the mind of audiences by helping them categorize, label, and evaluate information. If people use news frames to process the news and retain items that are consistent with their previous knowledge, it is said, news frames influence audiences and affect their interpretations and judgements. Price, Tewksbury, and Powers investigated the psychological effects of framing and found that “by activating certain concepts at the expense of others, news frames directly affect what enters the mind of audiences.”¹²

Pippa Norris analyzed the framing of the Cold War by American news media. Employing Entman’s definition of framing, she argued, “the Cold War frame highlighted certain events as international problems, identified their sources, passed judgments about the parties involved in the problem and recommended specific policy solutions.”¹³ Reese and Buckalew studied the role of local television in framing the news coverage of a particular issue. They specifically focused on the framing of the Persian Gulf War by a local television station and investigated how the “illusion of triumph” emerged at the community level as a result of the framing practices of the media. The study argued that television, through frames of reference, played a major role in selling the crisis and in shaping

6 Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm”, *Journal of Communication*, Vol.43, No.4, 1993, p.52.

7 Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*, Free Press, New York, 1978, p.278.

8 Tewksbury and Scheufele, “News Framing”.

9 Gerald Stone, Michael Singletary and Virginia P. Richmond, *Clarifying Communication Theories- A Hands-On Approach*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1999, p.276.

10 Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki, “Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse”, *Political Communication*, Vol.10, No.1, 1993, p.57.

11 Scheufele and Tewksbury, “Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming”, p.11.

12 Vincent Prince, David Tewksbury and Elizabeth Powers, “Switching trains of thought: The impact of news frames on readers’ cognitive responses,” *Communication Research*, Vol.24, No.5, 1997, p.481-506.

13 Pippa Norris, “The restless searchlight: Network news framing of the post- Cold War world,” *Political Communication*, Vol.12, No.4, 1995, p.361.

the public support for the President's decision. Reese and Buckalew demonstrated that local news amplified the definitions of the Gulf policy advanced by the government. The frames of reference produced by local news weakened opposing voices by proscribing expressions of dissent and pitting them against—while aligning the pro-war side with—patriotism. As a result, the media created a symbolic structure in which the illusion of triumph existed.¹⁴

Entman investigated how two similar incidents were framed in a different manner by the US media: the US downing of an Iranian plane and the Soviet downing of a Korean jet. While the news on the Soviet act emphasized the moral bankruptcy and guilt of the perpetrating nation; the US action de-emphasized guilt and focused on complex problems of operating military high technology. Entman concluded that “by de-emphasizing the agency and the victims and by the choice of graphics and adjectives, the news stories about the US downing of an Iranian airplane called it a technical problem, while the Soviet downing of a Korean jet was portrayed as a moral outrage.”¹⁵ Entman's approach provides researchers with a practical guide to analyzing how framing works, and its different levels.

We may gather framing studies under two broad categories: studies approaching framing as a dependent variable and as an independent variable. The former is concerned with the “frame building” processes; examining how certain frames are established in societal discourse and how certain frames compete for adoption by societal actors. The latter approach is more concerned with “frame setting”, in other words, the framing effects on audiences.¹⁶ In our study, we will be approaching framing as a dependent variable while locating framing processes in the making of the dominant political discourse in Turkey. So, we will exclude the problem of framing effects on audiences. Entman stated that communicators, the text, the receiver, and the culture are four different locations of frames in the communication process. In our study, we will focus on the texts, or the news items. The text frames issues through certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments.¹⁷ We contend that choices of words and their organization into news stories are not coincidental or secondary issues: “they hold great power in setting the context for debate, defining issues under consideration, summoning a variety of mental representations, and providing the basic tools to discuss the issues at hand.”¹⁸

Downing of the Russian Aircraft

The Russian Sukhoi Su-24 aircraft, on its way to the Khmeimim airbase, was shot down by a Turkish Air Force F-16 fighter jet on 24 November 2015 near the Syria-Turkey border. The Russian pilot, while parachuting down, was shot and killed by Syrian rebel ground fire, while the second pilot, who was the weapon systems officer, was rescued.¹⁹

14 Stephen D. Reese and Bob Buckalew, “The militarism of local television: The routine framing of the Persian Gulf War,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol.12, No.1, March, 1995, p.40-65.

15 Robert M. Entman, “Framing U.S. Coverage of International News: Contrast in Narratives of the KAL and Iran Air Incidents,” *Journal of Communication*, Vol.41, No.4, p.6.

16 Tewksbury and Scheufele, “News Framing”, p.22.

17 Entman, “Framing”, p.52.

18 Pan and Kosicki, “Framing Analysis”, p.70.

19 “Syrian rebels fired on parachuting Russian pilots, killing at least one after Turkey shot down warplane: official”, *National Post*, 25 November 2015. <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/turkey-blasts-russian-warplane-out-of-the-sky-says-jet-violated-its-air-space-pilots-fate-unclear>, (Accessed on 21 May 2017).

Russia has been taking the lead among other countries involved in the Syrian conflict. Within this context, she began her operations against ISIS on 30 September 2015. During October, Russian jets several times entered Turkey's airspace, flying over the Hatay area, and received warnings from Turkey as well as from NATO.²⁰ Between 3 and 15 October, Russian and Turkish officials came together several times to discuss Turkish rules of engagement and Russian violations of Turkish airspace.²¹ In a meeting held with the Russian military attaché and Russian Ambassador to Turkey on 19 November, Turkey criticized Russia for her operations near the Turkish border, a region occupied by Syrian Turks and warned Russia by stating that it would react to any violations threatening its border security.²²

After the incident, Turkish officials said, the jet, whose nationality was not known at that time, was shot down because it was flying inside Turkey's borders despite being warned 10 times over a period of five minutes before entering Turkish airspace to change its heading.²³ Russia, on the other hand, denied Turkey's allegations, stating that the Sukhoi was about 1,000 meters inside Syrian airspace when it was shot down.²⁴ Russian President Vladimir Putin responded strongly by saying the shooting of the aircraft was a "stab in the back, carried out by the accomplices of terrorists."²⁵ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan defended Turkey's action by pointing out that Turkey had the right to respond to any threats endangering its borders and airspace.

In the following days, the Russian Defense Ministry shut down all military contacts with the Turkish Armed Forces and Russian defense officials stated that future airstrikes in Syria would be escorted by fighter jets.²⁶ On 26 November, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev announced that they would apply broad economic sanctions against Turkey, which could have a negative impact on joint investment projects, including the possible shelving of a multibillion-dollar deal to build the Turkish Stream gas pipeline through Turkey.²⁷

On 28 November, President Putin issued a decree imposing harsh economic sanctions against Turkey.²⁸ The initial reaction of Turkey against Russia's sanctions was to defend itself by pointing out its right to protect the country's borders against any threat. Expressing their regrets, Erdoğan and

20 "Syria conflict: Russia violation of Turkish airspace 'no accident'", *BBC*, 6 October 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34453739>, (Accessed on 18 May 2017).

21 "Türkiye Ekim Ayında Rusya'yı Beş Kez Uyandı: Türk ve Rus yetkililer, Ekim ayında Rus jetlerinin Türk hava sahasını ihlalleri konusunda 5 kez görüştü", 24 November 2015, <https://www.haberler.com/turkiye-ekim-ayinda-rusya-yi-bes-kez-uyardi-7905849-haber/>, (Accessed on 18 May 2017).

22 "After shooting down Russian jet, what's next for Turkey?". *Al-Monitor*, 24 November 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/turkey-russia-syria-best-worse-case-scenarios-russian-jet.html>, (Accessed on 21 May 2017).

23 "Turkey's statement to the United Nations Security Council", *Al Jazeera*, 24 November 2015, http://live.aljazeera.com/Event/Turkey_downs_Russian_jet/207503335, (Accessed on 21 May 2017).

24 "Russian Defense Ministry Video Proves Su-24 Never Entered Turkish Airspace", *Sputnik*, 24 November 2015, <https://sputniknews.com/military/201511241030695406-mod-su-24-flight-path/> sputniknews.com, (Accessed on 27 May 2017).

25 "What Is a Fencer Su-24? What to Know about the Russian Plane Shot down by Turkey", *International Business Times*, 24 November 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/what-fencer-su-24-what-know-about-russian-plane-shot-down-turkey-2197848>, (Accessed on 28 May 2017).

26 Sarah Rainsford, "Russia sends clear message to Turkey: Don't try it again", *BBC News*, 25 November 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34925823>, (Accessed on 23 May 2017).

27 "Russia 'plans sanctions' against Turkey over jet downing", *BBC News*, 26 November 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34933608>, (Accessed on 22 May 2017).

28 "Russia Places Sanctions on Turkey", *The New York Times*, 28 November 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/europe/russia-places-sanctions-on-turkey.html?ribbon-ad-idx=5&rref=homepage&module=Banner&version=original®ion=Header&action=click&contentCollection=Home%20Page&pgtype=article&_r=0, (Accessed on 27 May 2017).

other Turkish officials underlined the importance of Turkey's actions being fully in line with the new rules of engagement. However, no official apology followed this.²⁹

The incident impacted Turkish public opinion about Russia negatively. According to the Social and Political Trends of Turkey Survey, which was conducted by the Turkish Studies Research Center of Kadir Has University in Istanbul in December 2015, Russia was seen as the most threatening country by 64,7% of respondents. In the 2016 research by the same center Russia was found to be the second most threatening country by 34.9% of respondents, while the U.S. topped the list with 44.1%.

About seven months after the incident, on 27 June 2016, Turkish President Erdoğan sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin. He expressed his deep regret and stated that a judicial investigation was underway.³⁰ After the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016, the two Turkish pilots were arrested on suspicion of having links to the Gülen movement.

With the normalization of affairs with time, Turkish President Erdoğan made his first trip to Russia on August 9, 2016, which was the first trip to Russia after the downing of the Russian aircraft in November 2015.

Polarization in Turkish Media

The contemporary media sphere of Turkey is characterized by a deep polarization and opposition between pro- and anti- government positions. A considerable section of media outlets directly functions as the voice of political power, the Justice and Development Party (JDP/AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*). Media and politics have always had a fluctuating relationship in Turkey; but in the past decade the Turkish model has tended to move towards what Akser and Baybars-Hawks called “a model of neoliberal media autocracy”.³¹ Press-party parallelism is one of the distinguishing features of this media model, which is defined as the partisanship of the newspaper system. Çarkoğlu and Yavuz note that the “alignment between the newspaper and the political party is discernible in organizational ties, in media contents, in personal affiliations of journalists and in political characteristics of newspapers’ community of readers as well.”³² Panayırıcı, İşeri and Şekercioğlu notes that Turkey’s media system matches the characteristics of the polarized pluralist model which “includes high media integration into party politics (or political parallelism) and state intervention, along with low media commercialization and journalistic professionalism.”³³ In the polarized pluralist model, as defined by Hallin and Mancini, newspapers are typically identified with ideological tendencies, and strong traditions of advocacy and commentary-oriented journalism.³⁴

29 “Turkey attempts damage control with Russia”, *Press TV*, 27 November 2015, <http://www.presstv.com/Detail/2015/11/27/439330/Turkey-Russia-Davutoglu-oped-Russian-jet>, (Accessed on 27 May 2017).

30 “Erdogan ‘sorry’ for downing of Russian jet”, *Al-jazeera*, 28 June 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/turkey-erdogan-russian-jet-160627131324044.html> (Accessed on 2 June 2017).

31 Murat Akser and Banu Baybars Hawks, “Media and Democracy in Turkey: Toward a Model of Neoliberal Media Autocracy”, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, Vol.5, 2010, p.302–321.

32 Ali Çarkoğlu and Gözde Yavuz, “Press–party Parallelism in Turkey: An Individual Level Interpretation”, *Turkish Studies*, Vol.11, No.4, 2010, p.614.

33 Uğur Cevdet Panayırıcı, Emre İşeri and Eser Şekercioğlu, “Political agency of news Outlets in a polarized media system: Framing the corruption probe in Turkey”, *European Journal of Communication*, Vol.31, No.5, 2016, p.552.

34 Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.60.

Especially after the 2007 general elections, the AKP made bold moves towards redesigning Turkey's media sphere with two interwoven strategies: taming and weakening the former mainstream media, and creating its own religious-conservative media bloc. Pressure on media conglomerates, judicial suppression, online banishment, surveillance, and finally discrimination in accreditation are the strategies used by the AKP to suppress the critical media.³⁵ The AKP created its own media through encouragement and by greasing the wheels for pro-government companies to invest in the media sector. Confiscation of several media companies by the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF), and their subsequent sale to pro-government businessmen through controversial tenders was instrumental in this process.³⁶ The AKP's strategy to suppress the media gained momentum after the 15 July 2016 failed coup attempt. 5 news agencies, 62 newspapers, 19 journals, 34 radio stations and 29 television channels (including the STV) were shut down following accusations that they had either taken part in or aided in the 15 July coup, or had been supporting the terrorist activities of Kurdish separatists. According to the Freedom of the Press 2017 report of Freedom House, Turkey's press freedom status is "Not Free"³⁷, and the Committee to Protect Journalists notes that at least 81 journalists are imprisoned in Turkey facing anti-state charges.³⁸

According to the results of a joint project by "Media Ownership Monitor (MOM) Turkey" run by IPS Communication Foundation/bianet and Reporter Ohne Grenzen, the German wing of RSF (Reporters Without Borders), displaying the ownership structures of the most important media outlets in Turkey, their ownership are traceable to individuals who are active in other industrial sectors, such as energy, transport and construction which depend on the government for public contracts. For example, in Turkish television, seven of the ten most important owners are politically affiliated with the ruling party. The print media circulations, on the other hand, are highly concentrated with four major owners holding 57% of readership. These are Doğan (22), Turkuvaz Media (15), Esmedyta (12) and Estetik Media (10).³⁹

Framing the Crisis: Method, Analysis and Findings

This study is deeply inspired by Entman's⁴⁰ categorization of news frames which we have briefly discussed above. In operationalizing framing theory, Entman focuses on four essential elements of news frames:

- **Attribution of responsibility in the news:** *who is targeted as the primary responsible for the event?*
- **Definition of events and actors:** *how is the event described and defined? How are actors defined?*

35 Akser and Hawks, "Media and Democracy", p.303.

36 "Shutdown Media", *Media Ownership Monitor Turkey*, <http://turkey.mom-rsf.org/en/findings/shutdown-media/> (Accessed on 13 June 2017).

37 "Freedom of the Press 2017", *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/turkey>, (Accessed on 15 September 2017).

38 "Turkey's crackdown propels number of journalists in jail worldwide to record high", *CPJ*, <https://cpj.org/reports/2016/12/journalists-jailed-record-high-turkey-crackdown.php>, (Accessed on 15 September 2017).

39 "Who owns the media in Turkey?" *Bianet*, <http://bianet.org/english/diger/180063-who-owns-the-media-in-turkey>, (Accessed on 3 June 2017).

40 Entman, "Framing", p.52.

- **Maintaining moral high ground:** *what kind of moral arguments and justifications/accusations are articulated in the news?*
- **Proposing solutions to crisis:** *what are the propositions for resolving the crisis? What kind of actions are proposed in the news discourse?*

In addition to these categories, we will also try to outline whose voices are heard in the news. In other words, the actors whose voices are heard, and whose statements are frequently quoted. In our analysis, we will present a qualitative analysis of news frames, by focusing on the discursive structures of the news texts. An analysis of newspapers will provide us with a systematic and comprehensive picture of media polarization in Turkey.

We have selected three pro-government and one anti-government newspaper, and analyzed all news on the issue, excluding the commentaries and columns. We have analyzed a total of 252 news items from between 25 November and 15 December 2015, by which time the issue had lost its prominence. The three pro-government newspapers were *Türkiye* (N:45), *Yeni Şafak* (N:65), and *Yeni Akit* (N:93). We selected these newspapers because, although all three have an open pro-government stand, they represent different religious-conservative positions and discourses. Among the three, *Yeni Şafak* is the closest to the Justice and Development Party's official discourse. Prominent and high ranking JDP figures such as Yasin Aktay (JDP Deputy) and Yalçın Akdoğan (JDP Deputy) regularly contribute to the newspaper with their columns. Also, among other columnists and reporters at *Yeni Şafak*, there are advisors to the Justice and Development Party at local and national levels. *Türkiye*, which is a relatively novel enterprise (in fact launched as the continuation of historical *Türkiye*) is another pro-government daily with a more centrist, pro-business and conservative stand. *Yeni Akit*, the most controversial among pro-government papers, is a highly Islamic, ultra-nationalist daily known for its sharp, polarizing and derogatory discourse. In our analysis, we will also try to reveal the convergence and divergence between these pro-government newspapers regarding the framing of an international crisis. Since one of the objectives of this article is to show the extent of polarization in Turkey's media landscape, we have selected *Cumhuriyet* (N:49), an anti-government newspaper, several of whose staff, including the former editor-in-chief, are currently being tried for aiding terrorist organizations and exposing state secrets.

In our analysis, we have given specific importance to headlines and leads since "a headline is the most salient cue to activate certain semantically related concepts in readers' minds; it is thus the most powerful framing device of the syntactical structure."⁴¹ The use of headlines, as we will show below, is also instrumental in embedding official (or dissident) discourses into the news discourse. In our analysis we have also analyzed the body of the news.

Attribution of Responsibility and Definition of the Event in the News

Without any exception, all three pro-government newspapers held the Russian authorities responsible for the incident. The newspapers framed the issue as an incident of border protection. According to the newspapers, what Turkey did was nothing but the protection of its airspace from a potential military threat. The newspapers strongly underlined that the Russian war plane was repeatedly warned by the authorities.⁴² *Türkiye* reported that the Russian jets had violated Turkish airspace twice before. The

41 Pan and Kosicki, "Framing Analysis", p.59-60

42 "We repeatedly warned", *Yeni Akit*, 25 November 2015.

incident was not the first.⁴³ In another news item, Russia's responsibility was further stressed by noting that Turkey had warned Russia five times in the previous month.⁴⁴ *Yeni Şafak* presented a detailed course of events in the news as follows:

Russia was warned before. The General Staff stated that the Russian plane had violated Turkish airspace at 9.20 over Yayladağı region. The warnings started 15 miles before the plane reached the border. Though the plane was warned 10 times in 5 minutes, it did not change its route. As the plane crossed the border, it was shot down in line with rules of engagement.⁴⁵

Severallinguistic and rhetorical strategies were used in stressing and underlining the responsibility of Russia in the event. One of these strategies is the one we frequently witness in news discourse: Presenting only one point of view or perspective in the news. In other words, the three newspapers barely gave any place to alternative interpretations and alternative descriptions of the event. Only the official version of the story was being told. This is primarily maintained by the highly selective choice of voices which are heard in the news. The news discourse mostly makes direct quotations (without using quotation marks) from official authorities and Governmental/Presidential figures, and in many cases the distinction between these statements and news items becomes blurred: "We have defended our borders."⁴⁶ In other words, the newspapers frame the issue mostly as it is framed by the official authorities. Extreme dependence on official news sources, and unproblematic treatment of official declarations as facts are the major reasons behind this affinity. President Erdoğan, and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu are the most frequently quoted figures in the news. This was followed by military sources, and other official sources and Justice and Development Party figures. Critical voices are almost completely absent in the news; and when they appear, they only become the target of pejorative, and in some cases insulting, comments.

The three pro-government newspapers framed the incident as a national matter, and considered any inside voice criticizing the shooting down of the plane as treachery. The critical voices are targeted for "stabbing the nation in the back", or for serving Russian interests. The Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*-CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*-HDP) leader Selahattin Demirtaş, and social media users who are opponents of President Erdoğan found place in the news discourse. *Yeni Akit*, through a play on words, called Kılıçdaroğlu "The minor ambassador (*küçükkelçi*) of Russia".⁴⁷ *Türkiye* criticized Kılıçdaroğlu for he "Criticized his own country instead of Russia".⁴⁸ Known for its polarizing and sharp political discourse, *Yeni Akit* labeled the critics as "Russia's Butlers".⁴⁹ *Yeni Akit* also accused these circles of defending the terrorist left and the terrorist organization PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) at home, and the Esed government in Syria. *Yeni Akit* stood out with its more aggressive and derogatory discourse towards Russia and towards opposition at home.

The statements of opposition leaders supporting Turkey's downing of the Russian plane were frequently quoted by the newspapers to justify their position. The Nationalist Action Party (MHP)

43 "This is not the first", *Yeni Şafak*, 26 November 2015.

44 "Turkey had warned Russia five times in October", *Türkiye*, 25 November 2015.

45 "We warned and shot down", *Yeni Şafak*, 25 November 2015.

46 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's words become the news headline, *Yeni Şafak*, 25 November 2015.

47 *Yeni Akit*, 25 November 2015.

48 *Türkiye*, 26 November 2015.

49 *Türkiye*, 25 November 2015.

leader Bahçeli's following comments exemplify this: "Full support from Bahçeli"⁵⁰, "Bahçeli: Putin is whining"⁵¹, "Bahçeli: Putin's demands are scandalous"⁵²

The definition of the event as a national matter was also deeply related with the discourse of the "New Turkey" and the new foreign policy principles of Turkey. The newspapers did not only stress the righteousness of Turkey; but also, framed the downing of the Russian plane as a matter of national pride. Directly quoting from President Erdoğan *Yeni Şafak* noted that "Turkey is acting in a noble manner."⁵³

Yeni Akit news stating "We showed our power"⁵⁴, was quoting several experts who considered the event as showing the power of the New Turkey; and noted that "Turkmen Mountain belongs to Turks".⁵⁵ *Türkiye* stated that the clash was between Ottoman-Turkey and Tsarist-Russia, and according to the newspaper neither power would be satisfied with their current geographic limits.⁵⁶ In all these newspapers, the intimidating power of "new Turkey" was stressed against comments calling for Turkey to apologize to Russia.

To sum up, without doubt or question, the event was framed by the three pro-government newspapers as an inevitable act conducted by Turkey to eliminate a possible threat. It was the reckless, aggressive and disrespectful actions of the Russian side that had caused the downing of the Russian plane.

In contrast, the anti-government *Cumhuriyet* framed the crisis as a consequence of Turkey's adventurous foreign policy, and implied that Turkey's affiliation with ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in the region was an essential part of the problem. *Cumhuriyet* underlined the "confusion" regarding the event, and contradictory statements from three different sources: Russia, Turkey, and the Turkmen.⁵⁷ *Cumhuriyet* also criticized President Erdoğan for making a statement on the incident before government and military officials did. According to the newspaper, President Erdoğan was stealing a role from other authorities.⁵⁸ The newspaper also pointed at the contradictory statements by Erdoğan regarding the issue.⁵⁹ *Cumhuriyet* also investigated the possibility of alternative measures that could have been taken instead of shooting down the Russian plane. Another distinction appears in the use of language. *Türkiye*, *Yeni Şafak* and *Yeni Akit* reported the event in the first-person plural ("We warned and shot down"⁶⁰), which caused a confusion between the statements of the officials and the news items. However, unlike these newspapers, *Cumhuriyet's* headlines were more neutral: "Turkey has shot down a Russian aircraft on Syria Border"⁶¹, "Who shot down the Russian airplane".⁶²

50 *Yeni Şafak*, 27 November 2015.

51 *Türkiye*, 27 November 2015.

52 *Yeni Akit*, 2 December 2015.

53 *Yeni Şafak*, 3 December 2015.

54 *Yeni Akit*, 5 December 2015.

55 *Yeni Akit*, 25 November 2015.

56 *Türkiye*, 27 November 2015.

57 "Who shot down the Russian plane?", *Cumhuriyet*, 25 November 2015.

58 "Anadolu Agency's effort for correcting Erdoğan's statement", *Cumhuriyet*, 25 November 2015.

59 "Erdoğan has backpedaled", *Cumhuriyet*, 26 November 2015.

60 *Yeni Şafak*, *Türkiye*, *Yeni Akit*, 25 November 2015.

61 *Cumhuriyet*, 25 November 2015.

62 Ibid.

As opposed to pro-government newspapers' almost exclusive attention to Turkish authorities' claims and statements; *Cumhuriyet* frequently quoted critical voices at home and abroad, including the Russian authorities.⁶³ Opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's harsh criticisms towards President Erdoğan⁶⁴; and other CHP figures' statements were frequently quoted.

For instance, in "ISIS petroleum enters Turkey through three routes"⁶⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, in the headline, directly quoted the Russian Ministry of Defense's claim that Turkey was aiding the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and President Erdoğan and his family were benefiting from these transactions.⁶⁶ In several other instances, the Russian authorities' demands and claims were directly moved to news headlines: "The Grey Wolves must be named as terrorists".⁶⁷

Maintaining the Moral High Ground

The three pro-government newspapers we have analyzed approached the crisis as a moral issue. According to the newspapers, Turkey was not only legally right, but also presented a morally superior position. The just and right position of the Turkish side was underlined by the support given by other international actors and universal and formal rules for the elimination of a threat; by pointing to Russian atrocities; and finally, by posing an opposition between the rational, problem-solving attitude of Turkey and the irrational and aggressive attitude of Russia.

Objectivity and neutrality claims are used effectively as framing devices in the news. Pan and Kosicki note that objectivity is sustained in three ways: "claiming empirical validity or facticity by quoting experts or citing empirical data, linking certain points of view to authority by quoting official sources, and marginalizing certain points of view by relating a quote or point of view to a social deviant."⁶⁸ Reporting the statements of foreign powers was a common strategy of the three newspapers for projecting objectivity in the news, and the moral superiority of the Turkish side. In all three newspapers, statements from the leaders of great powers were given in the first page: "USA President Obama: Turkey has the right to defend herself"⁶⁹; "Obama: We are at Turkey's side"⁷⁰; "Merkel: every country defends its borders";⁷¹ "We should respect Turkey says English Prime Minister Cameron."⁷² Also, the voices that were supporting Turkey's case were quoted in the news, including experts, international organizations, and representatives of other states: "International law specialist: Turkey's act is in accordance with international law"⁷³; "NATO Secretary General: Turkey is right"⁷⁴; "Georgian Minister of Defense: Turkey is right in shooting down the Russian war plane"⁷⁵.

63 "Putin: They shot our plane for petroleum", *Cumhuriyet*, 30 November 2015; "Message from Russia: Turkey has shocked us", 11 December 2015.

64 "Kılıçdaroğlu: Wait my brother, wait before you speak!", *Cumhuriyet*, 25 November 2015.

65 *Cumhuriyet*, 2 December 2015.

66 "Russia released the video: Erdoğan and his family are directly related with ISIS's petroleum transfers", *Cumhuriyet*, 2 December 2015.

67 *Cumhuriyet*, 1 December 2015.

68 Pan and Kosicki, "Framing Analysis", p.60.

69 *Türkiye*, 25 November 2015.

70 *Yeni Akit*, 2 December 2015.

71 *Türkiye*, 25 November 2015.

72 *Yeni Akit*, 25 November 2015.

73 *Yeni Şafak*, 25 November 2015.

74 *Yeni Şafak*, 25 November 2015.

75 *Yeni Akit*, 29 November 2015.

On the contrary, in many instances *Cumhuriyet* referred to statements of foreign authorities which undermined the Government's and Erdoğan's position: "Guardian: Erdoğan might be alienated".⁷⁶

"Rules of engagement" was one of the buzzwords used in justifying the Turkish side's action. The "Rules of engagement" was presented as a universal, formal, and neutral reference point which was pointed to by the news discourse in forging the moral high ground. *Yeni Şafak*⁷⁷ explained rules of engagement "as a set of rules that define how a country will evaluate the threat emanating from another country". The news also reminds its readers that a Syrian helicopter had been shot down in 2013 and a drone in 2015 as a consequence of these rules. So, the action of the Turkish side was nothing but a consequence of an undebatable, universal principle. Accordingly, any country, which finds itself in the position of Turkey would have done the same.

Portraying Russia and Russian figures as irrational, sentimental and aggressive entities who – in fact- have hidden agendas was a crucial element of the three newspapers' discursive strategy and framing of the events. "Eclipse of Reason" was the headline of *Türkiye*⁷⁸ which claimed that Russia's threatening and aggressive stand was bringing the issue to a deadlock. For *Yeni Akit*, "Putin is obsessed with Turkey".⁷⁹ Although the Turkish side stepped forward to solve the crisis, "The Kremlin closed the doors".⁸⁰

So, according to the pro-government newspapers it was this stubborn, irrational, and threatening approach that caused the crisis. Russia exacerbated the situation by introducing sanctions⁸¹, constantly lying⁸², and openly threatening Turkey⁸³.

Russia's maltreatment of Turkish citizens in Russia was another favorite theme for the newspapers. In "Turkish businessmen are under custody"⁸⁴ *Yeni Şafak* reported that 60 Turkish businessmen were taken into custody, and were sent to "concentration camps" to be deported. In the three newspapers, dozens of news items were published narrating the maltreatment of Turkish passengers traveling to Russia and Turkish citizens living in Russia.⁸⁵

Finally, the immoral stance of Russia was further stressed by the hidden agenda, or the real intentions of the Russian side. *Yeni Şafak* accused Russia of allying with Turkey's enemies in the Syrian regime and blamed it for supporting irredentist Kurdish groups in Russia which desired to establish a new state, and which might demand territory from Turkey in the near future.⁸⁶ Furthermore, *Yeni Şafak* further claimed that, Russia's main intention was to increase its power in the Mediterranean Sea, and that Russia was escalating and instrumentalizing the crisis to reach her goals.⁸⁷

76 *Cumhuriyet*, 7 December 2015.

77 "What is rules of engagement?", *Yeni Şafak*, 25 November 2015.

78 *Türkiye*, 27 November 2015.

79 *Yeni Akit*, 20 December 2015.

80 *Yeni Şafak*, 29 November 2015.

81 "Putin signed the sanctions", *Yeni Şafak*, 29 November 2015.

82 "Putin's double lies", *Yeni Şafak*, 27 November 2015.

83 "Threats and intimidation from Putin", *Yeni Akit*, 18 December 2015.

84 *Yeni Şafak*, 27 November 2015.

85 "Russia is oppressing the Turks in Russia", *Yeni Akit*, 2 December 2015; "Russia is tormenting Turkish students", *Yeni Şafak*, 2 December 2015.

86 "The dirty alliance gained power with the plane down", *Yeni Şafak*, 1 December 2015.

87 "The same old story of the last century", *Yeni Şafak*, 29 December 2015.

The moral superiority of the Turkish side was very much questioned by *Cumhuriyet*. One specific issue that was absent in *Türkiye*, *Yeni Akit* and *Yeni Şafak* was the human dimension of the issue.⁸⁸ The plane was shot down, but there were also two pilots, one of whom was shot dead by Syrian rebel forces. *Cumhuriyet* brought forward the stories of these two pilots, published an interview between saved pilot Konstantin Murahtin and *Russia Today*,⁸⁹ and discussed whether the killing of the second pilot while parachuting could be considered to be a war crime.⁹⁰ In contrast to the three newspapers' systematic efforts to prove the morally superior position of the Turkish side, *Cumhuriyet* cast doubt on the actions of the Turkish government and the forces it supported.

Furthermore, Turkey's official position was also questioned by *Cumhuriyet* through an underlining of the inconsistent attitude of Turkish authorities towards the crisis, and more essentially, through an overall critique of Turkey's adventurous foreign policy moves in the region. Again, direct and detailed quotations from critical voices were used as a device in framing the event and defining the newspaper's position. The CHP spokesperson Haluk Koç's harsh critique of the government and President Erdoğan, in which Erdoğan was accused of using and manipulating a serious international crisis to further polarize the public, is one of the examples.⁹¹ Below the news headline *Cumhuriyet* quotes Koç's words: "The burdensome cost of the Russian crisis will not be paid by those who live in luxury in the palace, but by our nation."

Solution to the Crisis

The three pro-government newspapers called for an immediate normalization of relations between the two countries. However, for normalization, the Russian side needed to think and act in a rational manner, and had to come to terms with the Turkish side. Against the Russian side's demands for an apology and compensation, the newspapers quoted Erdoğan, Davutoğlu and Minister of Foreign Affairs Çavuşoğlu stating that Turkey would not apologize.⁹²

However, we also see considerable efforts especially by *Türkiye* and *Yeni Şafak* to decrease the tension and normalize relations. Two basic strategies are used in establishing this: promoting friendship and dialogue, and stressing economic ties between the two countries.

During the ups and downs of the crisis, the newspapers reported several news items arguing that both sides were taking steps towards decreasing the tension and finding a solution to the crisis. Statements from both sides that aimed to settle the issue and stress friendship between the two countries were reported on the front pages.⁹³ Some news items emphasized how the two countries and their cultures were connected by highlighting the issue of Russian brides in Turkey,⁹⁴ making up a total of 135 thousand families. *Yeni Akit*, however, in line with its aggressive and xenophobic discourse did not prioritize these issues.

88 Entman, "Framing U.S. Coverage", p.17.

89 "The Rescued Russian Pilot Spoke", *Cumhuriyet*, 25 November 2015.

90 "War crime debate in social media", *Cumhuriyet*, 25 November 2015.

91 "Haluk Koç's reaction to Erdoğan", *Cumhuriyet*, 6 December 2015.

92 "Russia should apologize", *Yeni Şafak*, 28 November 2015; "We are right, No apologies!", *Yeni Akit*, 29 November 2015.

93 "Tension is decreasing", *Türkiye*, 26 November 2015; "The first contact is at Paris meeting", *Yeni Şafak*, 26 November 2015; "Davutoğlu: Russia is our friend", *Yeni Şafak*, 29 November 2015; "Erdoğan: The problem will be solved around the table", *Yeni Akit*, 4 December 2015.

94 "We have Russian brides, they have Turkish grooms", *Türkiye*, 27 November 2015.

From the first day of the crisis *Türkiye* gave a special place to news that stressed the economic ties between the two countries. By pointing to the damage that such a crisis could cause to both countries –especially Turkey- *Türkiye* called for diplomatic solutions and negotiations. The newspaper reported the statements of economic organizations,⁹⁵ think tanks,⁹⁶ and well-known business people.⁹⁷ *Türkiye*'s position was in conformity with its more centrist, moderate, pro-government and pro-business orientation. Meanwhile, for *Yeni Akit*, stressing economic ties between the two countries was only meaningful in terms of underlining the economic dependence of Russians on Turkey, and the indispensability of Turkey for Russia.⁹⁸

A different stance is observed in *Cumhuriyet*, both regarding the consequences of the crisis and the possible solutions proposed. In several news items *Cumhuriyet* stressed the destructive consequences (short term and long term) of the crisis for the Turkish economy. The state of exporters was reported to be “Psychological collapse”⁹⁹, and the newspaper frequently reported the negative consequences of the crisis on the energy¹⁰⁰, civil aviation¹⁰¹, tourism¹⁰², agriculture¹⁰³, and construction¹⁰⁴ sectors. In all these news items, Turkey's economic and strategic dependence on Russia was underlined by *Cumhuriyet*. Whereas, the pro-government newspapers stressed the mutual interdependence between the two powers. So, framing the problem in such terms implied that it was the Turkish side which should take a step to solve the problem.

Conclusion

The analysis of the news frames on the downing of the Russian aircraft showed how news discourse and political discourse are deeply related and intertwined in the case of three pro-government daily newspapers, *Türkiye*, *Yeni Akit* and *Yeni Şafak*. Also comparing these newspapers' frames with *Cumhuriyet*'s, we see how the over-politicized and over-polarized state of the media sphere in Turkey makes objective and professional journalism a difficult task. Be it pro- or anti-government, the news frames are very much politicized and are an extension of ongoing political divides within the country. At many instances journalistic practice and basic conventions and norms of journalism are left aside for the sake of gaining an ideological and political upper hand.

Framing analysis offers a systematic framework for deconstructing and understanding the news discourse by asking some basic questions: who are shown as being responsible? How are the events defined? What kind of moral and ethical arguments are put forward? What are proposed as solutions to the problem? For pro-government newspapers, in brief, it was Russia who was responsible for the event; the issue was border protection and national sovereignty, not military aggression; the act was in line with universal formal and informal rules and conventions; and Russia should renounce her claims

95 Turkish Exporters Assembly, “Trade and politics must be separated”, *Türkiye*, 27 November 2015.

96 SETA Economist, “The deals between the two countries are binding”, *Türkiye*, 27 November 2015.

97 Tuncay Özilhan, “Relations are solid: we will overcome this crisis”, *Türkiye*, 26 November 2015.

98 “Foreign Economic Relations Board: Russia cannot dispense with Turkey”, *Yeni Akit*, 26 November 2015.

99 “Psychological Collapse”, *Cumhuriyet*, 05 December 2015.

100 “Bad news for Turkey about purchasing natural gas from Iran”, *Cumhuriyet*, 5 December 2015; “Turkey's ‘gas pains’”, *Cumhuriyet*.

101 “Not enough passengers; Moscow flights are cancelled”, *Cumhuriyet*, 1 December 2015.

102 “Huge fall in number of tourists”, *Cumhuriyet*, 4 December 2015.

103 “Psychological Collapse”, *Cumhuriyet*, 5 December 2015.

104 “Exclusive economic sanctions to Turkey: No business with Turks”, *Cumhuriyet*, 28 November 2015.

and demands. Whereas, for *Cumhuriyet*, there was an ambiguity regarding the main responsible party of the event; the event was a result of Turkey's adventurous foreign policy; Turkey might have violated international law; and Turkey must take steps towards solving the crisis.

The framing of the Russian crisis by pro-government newspapers also said many things about the political discourse of the Justice and Development Party, and how it is being reproduced and disseminated in the cultural and intellectual spheres. Framing of the event as a matter of national pride and national greatness, and constant references to "new Turkey" is in line with the JDP's, more specifically with Erdoğan's populist nationalism, which finds one of its most peculiar expressions in Turkey's neo-Ottoman domestic and foreign policy agenda.¹⁰⁵ The way the dissident voices are framed by the newspapers ("traitors", "domestic Russians", "Russia's butler") is also in line with this discourse; since populist anti-pluralism in some cases goes so far as to deny the existence of a legitimate opposition.¹⁰⁶

The overall argument brings us to the relationship between framing and political discourses. In more polarized and less free media environments news frames of pro-government news outlets tend to follow and to be directed by the way events are framed by political actors and dominant political discourses. Partisanship triumphs over objective and ethical journalism. In these cases, the line separating dominant political and cultural frames from news frames becomes blurred. This is sustained through some main journalistic twists as we have discussed above: mostly taking the statements and explanations of official authorities for granted, repressing the dissident voices, and making it harder to separate the official voice from that of the newspaper's. There are several structural and historical reasons behind such symbiosis. However, the conclusion is that the news frames become more and more dependent on official frames, which further increases the dependence of journalistic practice on official sources. However, it is the capacity of the media to present frames alternative to those official voices which makes media a crucial force in constituting a democratic political regime with citizens being provided with critical and multifarious information. The overlapping of the frames in domestic and international affairs points to a loss of that critical capacity.

105 Bilge Yabancı, "Populism as the problem child of democracy: the AKP's enduring appeal and the use of meso-level actors", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol.16, No.4, 2016, p.599.

106 J. W. Müller. "Parsing Populism: Who is and who is not a populist these days", *Juncture*, Vol.1, No.2, 2015, p.85.