

Bypassing The Dominant Media By The ICTS: The Opportunities and Challenges facing a State Institution in Turkey

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Abstract

The new media presents the opportunity of preparing institutional-autonomous news for the organisations that wish to 'bypass' the dominant media. In this article, 'flexible new media opportunities' is the relationship-communication of the political actors with their public through the media. The representation of the political actors in the dominant media often creates a gap between what these actors aim to convey in terms of political communication and what actually happens. Consequently, the interruption of the structural partiality of the dominant media creates within the communication of the 'opponent' politics and also shapes 'flexible new media operations'. This situation will be exemplified with a case study of the 'e-Memorandum' 27 April 2007 that the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) issued over the Internet. This example supports the argument that the new media opportunities facilitate the preparation of institutional-autonomous news that allows organisations and institutions to bypass the dominant media.

Key Words: *New media, e-Memorandum, Flexible Media Opportunities, Political Communication, and Political Strategy.*

Egemen Medyanın Yeni İletişim Teknolojileri Dolayısıyla "Bypass" Edilmesi: Türkiye'de Bir Devlet Kurumunun Karşı Karşıya Kaldığı Olanaklar ve Zorluklar

Özet

Yeni medya, egemen medyayı 'bypass' etmek isteyen kurum ve kuruluşlar için kendi kurumsal-özerk haberlerini oluşturma olanağı sunmaktadır. Bu makalede, 'yeni medyanın esnek olanakları' olarak bahsedilen şey, siyasal aktörlerin yeni medya üzerinden kamularıyla iletişimi ilişkisidir. Siyasal aktörlerin geleneksel medyadaki temsili, siyasal iletişimde amaçladıklarıyla gerçekleşen arasında çoğu zaman bir fark içermekte ve bu durum, adı geçen aktörler için olumsuz siyasal sonuçları üretmektedir. Sonuçta egemen medyanın yapısal tarafgirliği, 'muhalif' siyasetin iletişimi kesinti yaratmakta, aynı zamanda da 'yeni medyanın esnek olanaklarını' biçimlendirmektedir. Bu durum, bir örnek olay niteliği kazanan, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nin (TSK), 27 Nisan 2007 tarihinde İnternet üzerinden yayımladığı 'e-Bildirge' üzerinden tartışılacaktır. Bu örnek, yeni medya olanaklarının, kurumsal-özerk haber oluşturmaya kolaylaştırarak egemen medyayı 'bypass' etmelerine imkan tanıdığı argümanını desteklemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Yeni Medya, e-Bildirge, yeni medyanın esnek olanakları, siyasal iletişim, siyasal strateji.*

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Introduction

The concept of flexibility is the state of an active-strategic actuality towards changing the circumstances and the institutional relationships in the direction of a certain aim and making them feasible. On the other hand, politics is a form of social relationship with a strategic character formed in the framework of the concept of 'power'. The flexibility of the political communication in this context is evaluated in relation to the relative autonomy and the inherent strategic capabilities of the institutions. One of the ways that a political organisation can achieve flexibility is with information and communication technologies (ICTs), in particular with the new media such as 3G, IPTV, mobile TV, web pages, blogs, and social networking sites.

In fact, as a hybrid technology, ICTs were designed and developed to add a flexible organisation capability to business institutions such as multinational companies and large holdings. For example, Castells (1996) makes it clear that while developments in ICTs have facilitated the reorganization of economic activity to be more flexible and adaptable, the primary force behind such developments has been the need for capitalism to undergo a restructuring process after entering a period of crisis in the early 1970s. In this sense ICTs, which provide for the decentralization of production but the centralization of capital and control, have prepared a solid foundation for the separation of manual and mental labour and the models of flexible labour organizations such as flexible working hours, flexi-time and wage flexibility (Webster, 2006: 80).

Consequently, in this article, in terms of flexible political organisation ability, 'flexible new media opportunities' is defined as a relationship that the political actors establish with the public through different media. In this sense, the new media provides new opportunities for direct communication with the public and in some ways; it can bypass the dominant media or conventional news organisations. The importance of bypassing the dominant media intervention can be seen in the practice of the political actors in 'not talking over media' or 'not being able to express themselves correctly in the media'. Thus, political actors become more visible and can make their 'own' news.

Institutional organisations often fall outside commercial media, in the context of a single event-news, or even actively exclude the commercial/dominant media from performing news making on their behalf. Therefore, by using the new media these organisations can communicate directly with the public. This marks a change in the traditional division of labour and roles among those who are the source of the news and those who produce the news.

In the liberal press paradigm, the golden rule of the publication policy of the traditional media (especially in the printed press on a national scale) is to be or seem impartial in terms of politics. This is particularly important during periods of political activity such as prior to elections. It is at these times that the media being perceived as losing its impartiality means its circulation will fall and its image will be diminished in terms of public opinion. In recent years, the media has been placed near the bottom in the public opinion surveys that ranked the credibility of institutions in Turkey. For example, according to the results of the 2010 Confidence in Media research conducted by Estima for the Journal of Marketing Turkey, the dominant/commercial media/printed press was third from the bottom with rate of 23.1 per cent.*

Impartiality, in the liberal press paradigm, defines the media as standing at an equal distance from the political parties. In terms of the media and reader-audience mass relationship, impartiality can be considered as the political equivalent of the 'shifting to the centre' phenomena of a political party in the sense of an attempt to embrace as many sectors of society as possible. However, by the very nature of the press being 'liberal' there exists a political bias; the owners of the media and the workforce will inevitably carry their political beliefs into the workplace (Chomsky et al.; 2004: 36). As a result, news as a reconstruction of social reality is partial and this situation constitutes a real dilemma.

Therefore, the main issue is the way the new media can counteract the negative impact that the structural impartiality of the dominant media has on the coverage of opposition politics and how the alternative media can facilitate the development of flexible politics. News, within the individualised, interactive and multiple circumstances of the new media has become visible, attainable, consumable and producible anytime, anywhere and intervention in the production of the news became easier in terms of both the institutional media organisations and the political-social actors outside the traditional mass media.

In Turkey, the military is specifically charged with the task of defending the constitution of the nation. In the run up to the 22nd July 2007 general election and the Presidential election the power struggle between the various actors accelerated and involved constitutional issues. Furthermore, the mass media was mounting a campaign to 'demilitarize politics', however, at the same time the partiality of the media was being questioned. Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) decided to counteract the media campaign and take advantage of the public's loss of confidence in the mass media and used the new media to present its response to the challenges to the constitution. On 27 April 2007 at 23.08 TAF posted its e-Memorandum that contained the message of political regime is in danger on its website.

This article will discuss the role of new media in terms of flexible new media opportunities and show how new media has provided the opportunity to generate flexible reporting and the production of public information for various social groups, politicians and bureaucrats. The first section contains a critical assessment of politics as a form of strategic relationship among the concrete and relational political forces within the state. This article argues that the success in the use of flexible new media opportunities by these actors depends on the ability to organise specific information (in terms of collection and dissemination) related to the field and to be able to structure the political strategy around this specific information. The second section examines the structural and functional appearance of media partiality in terms of the media as a subcontractor. In this context, the dominant class needs to coordinate the strategies in order to protect and maintain its political supremacy in distinct power relations and the media is one of the main subcontractors or coordinators in this sense. The third section will briefly describe the period prior to posting of the e-Memorandum on the TAF website with particular reference to the rise to power of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and their relationship with the dominant media. A discussion focusing on the e-Memorandum as a practice of flexible new media operation and its relationship with the new media will be presented in the fourth part. In this discussion, e-Memorandum case was evaluated in terms of instrumental ability of new media not its' discursive peculiarities. The conclusion argues that the new media opportunities facilitate the preparation of institutional-autonomous news that allows for the organisations and institutions to bypass the dominant media.

1. Politics as a Form of Strategic Relationship

As Jessop (2005: 95-96) comments, the state actually does not exercise power directly. Its forces activate concrete political powers that occur in a certain conjuncture. Similarly, Van Dijk (2005: 317-319) states that power in the social sense is frequently indirect and it is processed via the minds of the people. Thus, the power of the state is a combination of the concrete and relational political forces within the state and that occur through the mediation of the state. Resistance from forces outside the state frequently confronts politicians and bureaucrats in their roles as the policy makers and implementers within the state system, including the media. Weber (1947) explains how these two groups and the military enact this power on a daily basis. Therefore, in a society where civil society institutions and trade union organisations have not developed or have limited influence, there are three main actors, which have the ability and the power to structure the political strategy, those with political power (the government; politicians and civil servants), the army and lastly, the media.

With the introduction of new media, these main actors gained a new tool with which to structure

their flexible politics as a form of strategic relationship. When defining politics as a form of strategic relationship, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of the interaction with the media, not only in terms of its relationship with other strategic actors and but also its political-institutional strategy. The latter is concerned with the media presenting itself as the spokesperson of the public opinion or common sense.

The impartiality of media is understood to be editorial independency at the inter-institutional level and vis a vis the political power, however, it appears that editorial dependency relation or the dependency of the formation of the publication policies and content production vis a vis the media ownership is not under consideration (Nissen, 2006: 36-37). However, in today's dominant media structuring where editorial control over the content production established by occupational specialization, professional codes and the labour relations, this dependency relation is established over the direct-organic relationship between the editor-in-chief and the media ownership (in terms of the proprietors and the shareholders).

This strategic convergence between the media and those with political power occurs because of the direct contact between editorial management (as the editor-in-chief) and those who own media. In particular, in large holdings, the editorial directors of the media companies are also members of the management boards of other units within the company, which consolidates the dependency relationship between directors and owners of media companies. However, this dependency does not only exist between them. It is also necessary to take into consideration the dependency relation between the editor-in-chief and columnists, correspondents and department heads. This second group controls the content production through the differentiated labour relations in the media organizations.

The success of political power in establishing influence over public opinion is closely related to this dependency relationship. The way of establishing and extending public opinion support is through the frequent use of consubstantial symbols that identify the interests of political power with those of the public opinion, in communication. In short, using and repeating these consubstantial symbols or symbolic representations generate the ideological value of content. The frequent use of the symbols is the way that reconciliation is established and extended from those with political power to the public and those who act in the public interest.

Media representation gains value and importance in the context of the successful or unsuccessful representation of this reconciliation for the political power together with the intellectual-ideal factors that it includes. The 'reel politic', unified as public opinion and political power in an organic way is established over the media content or the media reality, produced by the mediation of the professional codes (Meyer, 2002: 54). Media representations are the tools for implementing the populist strategy, reducing the resistance of politicians, civil servants and bureaucrats to the construction of the ideological-political hegemony, as well as ensuring the presentation of the common interests of the citizens. Since the 'public' within the concept of public opinion is not single but multiple, and since 'vote' is not knowledge but conviction, the media's agenda is in fact formed not for the ordinary person in the street but for the bureaucrats who are either the catalyst or the retardant of political action.

Within the political structure of the nation state and historical power blocs, the military have been one of the main actors. Traditionally, the ruling classes have contributed to maintaining the privileged position of the military and supported its role in ensuring social harmony within society. Turkey is a good example of how the army intervened in the political system and was active in the restructuring of the civil government at various times in the history of the Turkish republic starting from the 1960's.

Consequently, in the power struggle between the actors structuring the strategy of politics in given conditions, the aim is the strategic collaboration between those with political power and the

dominant-widespread media based on common interests with economic-political characteristics. This means in countries where neo-liberalism is developing, the scale of the strategy of diminishing the state so it is only constituted from political power. This restructuring based on the logic of a flexible organisation, which is specific to the private sector facilitates the vertical and horizontal integration of the local with the global. Thus, it is necessary to eliminate or neutralize the third actor, the military. However, in Turkey, TAF positions itself uncompromisingly as the protector of the nation state which is different from the role of the military in Western democracies; thus, TAF does not fit with the concept of neo-liberal flexible structuring not only in the economic-political sense but also in a practical sense.

2. Structural and Functional Appearance of Media “Partiality”

The functional opportunities of the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as flexibility, network organization, vertical/horizontal integration, organization learning, speed and security can also be used in order to define the role and function of the media with regard to the power struggle between the actors in the structuring of the political strategy. In this context a successful strategy has to be harmonious with the opportunities of creating, transforming or continuing certain social relations together with structural limitations in given conditions. The dominant class needs the strategic coordination in order to protect and continue its political supremacy in particular power relations and the media is one of the main flexible coordinators.

The partiality of the media is based on two main dynamics with structural and functional characteristics. The media, during the process of commercialization became an area of economic-sector activity. In this context, its place and function within the ‘power bloc’ (Gramsci, 1971: 261) was consolidated; its unity of interests with the political power for the maintenance and sustainability of the status quo was also strengthened. In these circumstances, the partiality of media might be connected with such developments as the ‘media of power’ replacing the ‘power of media’ and the public crisis of confidence which is exposed by the dominant media in representative democracies.

At the point of the functional dynamic or gathering, processing and distribution of news, it must be emphasized that, beyond simply conveying a message. The media through symbolic representations is actually making a fiction of the reality, which has an ideological-representative character. What is called media reality is in fact a reality, which the media constructs not from the standpoint of ‘factual’ news but from its own standpoint with its own language. In this sense, the partiality of media can be connected to the social trend in politics in the general sense or with the application of perception/image management that the media institutions carry out on behalf of the political powers.

When evaluating partiality within the context of the total de-politicisation of society by the dominant media, it can be said that the new media provides opportunities for the creation of alternative political strategies with a functional characteristic however; this depends on who is using the tool for which purposes. Thus, it is debatable whether the new media does provide an alternative, despite this; it is possible to use the ‘e-paradigm’ in order to form a basis for the argument in this paper: the alternative character of new media is not only its technological capability but also its alternative (political) content generating capabilities.

Today, the main input-output set of the e-paradigm is the cheap information input and the Internet-based (Internet Protocol) services output with nearly infinite diversity or according to Pratt’s (2000: 427) designation by e-commodities of the weightless economy like software. This can be compared with a distinct set from the mass production (analogue technology) paradigm. This set is supported with new technical opportunities such as access from multiple/single point to multiple/single points, a-synchronized communication and portability, in terms of the results it produces, points to a new communication-business environment where multi-dimensionality and diversity prevail and to the new economy which feeds on the input of cheap information.

This diversity forms the basis for the new media to overcome the obstacle that the dominant-widespread media is viewed as partial. The new media provides an important economic opportunity in the structuring of the news-content production: widespread-differentiated access with low enterprise/management cost. Furthermore, in terms of computer-supported social networks, the new media can provide a social service by becoming an available Internet communication channel with interaction from multiple points/to a single point or from a single point/to multiple points at the level of individuals. The new media's looser central structure differs from the mass communication tools and it is able to consolidate its social basis with the need for a physical structure.

Hence, there is limited opportunity for the political and economic forces with a hegemonic characteristic to establish absolute dominance over the new media. At this point, in connection with the social basis of the opportunities of the new media, an important development has begun to be experienced in terms of news and (direct) news-making activity. The news has become visible, producible and easy to interrupt in the individualised, interactive and multiple environments of the new media. The principle qualities, which separate the new media from the traditional media in terms of forming news and holding the attention of the public, are instantaneity and continuity. Thus, new media provides valuable opportunities for the independent news producer-to distribute the information without any intermediates controlling the communication.

3. The Period before the TAF “e-Memorandum” and the Rise to Power of the AKP

The media has shown its ability to influence the political stage. One recent example was Boris Yeltsin, who despite having poor results in public opinion polls, was elected president of Russia after an expensive election campaign and extensive media support. In 1993 a media campaign in Spain was begun against the ruling socialist party that seemed to contribute to the election of a right wing government in 1996. A further example was Berlusconi's rise to power in Italy orchestrated by a colourful campaign launched by his own media cartel. The situation is no different in Turkey, a campaign run by the dominant media cast doubt on the viability of the coalition government because of the ill health of President Ecevit before the 2002 November elections in Turkey. This media action could be seen to be part of the rise to power of AKP.

Those who left the Welfare Party and having learnt the necessary established AKP. AKP, emerged from the Welfare Party which had been prevented from running for office, has tried to avoid defining itself as an Islamist/religious party. Rather it adopted a conservative democrat perspective learning lessons from the process of closure of the Welfare Party and emphasizing democracy in the party policies in the context of full support for the EU accession process. Thus, the economic and political targets of AKP seem to be formulated within a liberal economic framework. As Turunc (2007: 90) comments, 'AKP and the rise of Islamist politics has demonstrated that the AKP wishes to join the global modernity project and integrate itself into the global economy'.

AKP came to power in 2003 with 47 per cent of the vote and proceeded to implement changes. These changes were seen as to be pro Islam and against the secular constitution of the Turkish Republic by the opponent media. Thus, the tension between AKP and the military, charged with the protection of the constitution, continued to grow. Another tension factor is the relations with the U.S. over northern Iraq and slowing down Turkey's EU accession process. The situation grew more serious when Abdullah Gül, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, was proposed as a candidate for the Presidency. The election of an Islamist president was to warn the prospective candidate that his secular stance was untrustworthy. The argument of opposition then assumed the strategy of seeking to exclude all non-secular elements from the strongholds of secularism, or from acceding to the post of the presidency. The main opposition party Republican People's Party applied to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the Presidential elections. In the Turkish parliament such as the CHP, ANAP and DYP collectively boycotted the election, and did not participate in the voting procedure. Although strong bloc was formed against AKP, they remained in power.

Although the media on its own does not have an ability to shape the political stage, however, it can offer important support for the political groups. Doğan Media Group and some newspapers and television companies** supported the rise to power of AKP. These 'advocate' media groups whose ownership structure had changed under the influence of the 2000-2001 economic crises and also by regulatory mechanisms such as the RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Board).

Under the AKP government, different tools, this could control the media not directly through the Press Code but indirectly, for instance, via article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code (TPC) and institutionalizing auto-censorship were utilized. Despite the ostensible correction that was made in the TPC 301 on 30 April 2008, since these changes, 32 journalists have been imprisoned. A new regulation tool is about to be added to these mechanisms in order to control local press. When the Public Tenders Law, currently on the national assembly, when it is passed and the official announcements and advertising fees that are distributed from the Press Advertisement Institution to the local press will be eliminated, thus, many newspapers dependent on this income will have to close down. As a result, in Turkey in the process of diminishing the opposition against those in power, the interest relations between the dominant media and the current government play an important role. Consequently, it can be said that, in the construction of the 'sacred alliance' between the AKP government and the dominant media, this important role starts to show a trend to widespread AKP propaganda that operates in an effective manner.

On the other hand, the dominant media by connecting the analysis of the 2000-2001 economic crises in Turkey and the active approach during the integration process between Turkey and the EU directly or indirectly with the political power. All the political events that take place in the country are announced to the world as "democratization movements" initiated by AKP. It can be said that the political organization ability of the dominant media has led to it being in the position of a dominant actor in the restructuring of the political power in Turkey. When this strategic collaboration between the AKP government and the dominant media is taking into consideration together with the media which is the product of certain public policies, it becomes obvious that the pulling effect which the determining position of the political powers create in the structuring of media policies in the dominant media is exerted in the direction of the political powers. The dominant media, after seeing the current political power will be permanent also in the second period (after the 22 July 2007 elections), clarified its supportive attitude, which might be summed up as 'AKP performs best'. Thus, the media's positioning near to the political power is of vital importance in terms of the influence that can be gained to encourage the government to enact policies which support liberalisation at the national-international scale, together with the elimination of rules and monopolisation in the field of media and telecommunication.

4. e-Memorandum as a Tool of Flexible New Media Operations

Although the AKP government has influence in the media, as seen in public opinion polls the Turkish public have more confidence in TAF than the media. In a 1998 survey by Economic and Social Studies Foundation of Turkey, 94 per cent of the 2,705 people interviewed said TAF was the institution that people trusted. The confidence rates for television and the press were 51 and 50 percent respectively. In another survey was conducted in rural areas by the Anar Research Company in 2005, TAF was the most trusted institution with 84.4 per cent, the Supreme Board of Education and media shared the last two ranks with 45 per cent in terms of public confidence (Uzun, 2007: 23). According to a survey by the BBC and Gallup in 2005 of 52,000 people in 68 counties respondents in Turkey in answer to the question "which institution in your country that you trust most?" stated "the army". The ratio for the answer to same question across all 68 countries was 26 per cent and for the European countries, it was 31 per cent. In the same survey, in Turkey the confidence rate the media and for politicians was 8 per cent and 5 % per cent respectively (Yıldız, 2007: 108).

The reason for this level of confidence and why TAF is among the actors who have a part in structuring the strategy of politics in Turkey can be explained by its role in defending the constitution of

the Turkish Republic. In the history of the Turkish Republic, the process of democracy has been interrupted with two coup d'états and three memorandums, politicians have been banned from office and political parties have been disbanded. Apart from direct action in the coup d'états, TAF continued its activity in the political arena of the country. After 1990 TAF brought a new, indirect approach to the idea of coup d'état.

The first example of this approach was the written warning to politicians in the conservative, community-based Islamic coalition government on 28 February 1997. Known as the 28th February Decisions, this Post-modern coup d'état or civilian memorandum signalled an important event in Turkish political history. The general aims of the decisions were to protect the principle of secularism and create of new laws to do this. After these decisions, the Constitutional Court closed down the Welfare Party and banned its Chairman Necmettin Erbakan and six of the top party administrators from becoming members of political parties for five years. Nowadays too, these decisions are strictly implemented. Any moves that are considered to endanger secularism in the country are immediately challenged. For example, the ruling party (AKP) had become the focal point of anti-secular activities. The latest example of the intervention of the military in Turkish politics occurred three days before the announcement of the decision of the Constitutional Court about the Presidential Elections when the General Staff of TAF on the institution's web page posted a manifesto containing severe warnings to those who act against the secularism of the Turkish State.

The case of what was dubbed the e-Memorandum by the press shows the potential power that the new media provides to structure and coordinate the political strategies of institutions via communication networks at national or global level. By publishing the e-Memorandum over the Internet sent the message that TAF wished to present to go beyond the time limitation obstacle of the traditional media. In fact, TAF had made comments about the government prior to e-Memorandum in a press conference on 12 April 2007. However, the traditional mass media had presented the information in a very limited and vague manner. By placing the manifesto on the Internet TAF ensured that the full text was fully accessible to the reader and thus, they could make their own interpretation of the message. Of course, the TAF's strategy could not completely bypass the traditional media who made their own comments concerning the e-Memorandum. As Yıldız (2007: 285) states that the event was announced in the headlines of newspapers on 28 April 2007, as the 'midnight declaration from the army' an institution that was involved in 'secret underhand business' thus trying to promote negative public opinion in relation to TAF. In this event, not only did TAF's e-Memorandum bombshell catch the media unprepared the method of delivery and timing was a further shock. Thus, TAF gave a message about its ability to perform a sudden coup d'état by functionalizing the Internet instead of performing a sudden coup d'état at an ever-expected moment. It combined with some true achievements of the AKP government, such as the inclusion of the poor masses into the social security system, economic and social development programs in the countryside, and progress in the EU accession process.

Considering that the strategies are materialized together with their structural determinations and material supports within certain organisations (Jessop, 2005: 141), it can be seen that the coordination capability of TAF was problematic because of the difficulties "collaboration based on political interests" between the other two main actors (political power and dominant media) in terms of external support. Another problem that TAF faced was the anti-democratic legacy from the periods of coup d'état of the strategic structure where the military action bypassed public opinion. Thus, the use of new media is based on bypassing the public representation capability of the dominant media with a tactic of 'scooping the news'.

On occasion this flexibility of the political communication strategy using the new media aims to interrupt international support for a dominant political power. For example, after the e-Memorandum, on 24 May 2007 on the TAF web site the United States Air Force (USAF) together with the Greek Air Force was included in the list of the flights that had violated Turkish air space. This action came as a surprise to Washington and the response to the latest incident recorded on the TAF website was reported on 27 May 2007 in Hürriyet Newspaper. A US Ankara Embassy Press

spokesperson confirmed that there had been a flight but it had not been planned, it was due to an accident and an investigation had been launched about the incident.

The revelation on the TAF web site also surprised the AKP government, which was looking for an answer as to why the flights on that day were deemed to be violations when there were already USAF F-16 fighter aircrafts in the USAF air base in İncirlik in South east Turkey. The spokespeople from the US foreign affairs ministry stated that training flights were being undertaken from Bagram to Northern Iraq and announced for the first time that they had been confronted with such a situation. However, in fact, Washington was looking to Ankara, its political correlate, to explain why TAF had posted a 4 minute violation of Turkish air space on its web site and had apparently placed their ally in the same category as their problematic Greek neighbours. However, Turkish public opinion took a different view. Comments made by visitors to the TAF web site identified the violation of air space with a previous event in Northern Iraq of the US military covering the heads of Turkish soldiers with sacks. This was seen as further evidence of the misuse of American political power. TAF took the discussions, which started with the visit of Prime Minister Erdoğan in order to receive political approval from the American Government before the general elections into the common denominator of the imprudence of the political power with this declaration.

As can be seen in these examples, the opportunities for a different political communication strategy with new media support should not be underestimated. In this context, the structural determinations of the TAF's political communication strategies have experienced problems, are there no alternative political actors who are able to create an articulate opposition to the AKP government. In the Turkish case there is no alternative policy discourse, the collaboration of the ruling party and dominant media operates quite successfully. The dominant media has proved that it is the best subcontractor for both coordinating and manufacturing public opinion by developing a counter-strategy that made the problematic situation of the TAF strategies visible.

The necessity, which the main political actors feel for such kind of a subcontractor, is also valid for TAF. The institutional ability of TAF might be inadequate when one goes beyond the military field and passes into the area of the restructuring of the political strategy. Hence, the discussions, which started on the ending of the cross-border military operations in Iraq by TAF, are also indicators of this inadequacy. TAF, although they realised the fact that "now the battlefields of war are no longer the sea, land and air but in the minds of the people" (Yıldız, 2007: 15), was insufficient in leading the dominant media. One of the main problems for TAF is in the dividedness and instability of the support of the dominant-widespread media as well as in subcontractor's support being limited to a few alternative media institutions. The large scale of the relationship of the political power and the dominant media leaves a small empty space. As exemplified in the 'Republican Meetings' organized by the secular sections of the Turkish society against the AKP government, support for the government outside that presented by the dominant media is limited. This was also seen in the results of the general election.

Today, although those with political power and those within the bureaucracy are important sources of news, the files and electronic postings introduced over the Internet are equally important sources (Törenli, 2005: 199). It is debatable the extent to which the Internet is an independent communication tool but the important point is to take advantage of the opportunities that it brings. In this context, TAF, by choosing the Internet route to present its e-Memorandum tried to avoid the partiality that exists in the traditional media environment that is more under the control of the dominant political power.

On the other hand, the new media, in the case of the e-Memorandum, is that it provides the opportunity to reverse the squeeze in the media time and space and to go beyond the mechanisms of the institutionalized structuring about the issue of the value of news, which filter the text of the news. This opportunity at the same time is pointing out to the vulnerability of the pre-agreement of the 'not every event is news but it becomes news when I make it' which is stereotyped though eroded by the crisis of public confidence where journalism has fallen.

The Internet declaration by TAF and the reactions to this event clearly show that the new media can be of use in a power struggle. However, the new media is experiencing the disadvantage of being compartmentalised and communicates with particular groups whereas the traditional media that can easily communicate with the public as a whole, at the same time with the same content. Thus, it can be considered that effectiveness of the new media is debatable. The new media has greater influence when it is used together with the traditional mass communication tools. The simplest evidence that support this view is that TAF contacted a journalist from the dominant media to inform them that the e manifesto was about to be published on the Internet.

Conclusion

The technical support of the new media, introduced in order to flex the political organisation, promises a participative-solidarity based structuring in which participation in the political process is greatly increased. In the sociological sense, the force of this potential to determine the participative structuring in practice or to realize the expectations about a new democracy equivalent to 'a new era of the Athens Democracy***' should be evaluated within the context of its limitations. Emphasizing that the Internet is accessed from anywhere at any time and it is spreading means ignoring the fact that the new power structure of the virtual environment that hides the power, making it invisible and constitutes a problem that enhanced existing biases in the distribution of knowledge and information in terms of the action against democracy.

Therefore, it can be seen that the Internet is not a power-free environment where there is endless liberty. The situation, which Roberto Michels called the 'Iron Law of the Oligarchy' in the beginning of the 20th century, is also true for this environment. In the Internet environment, which is said to have no 'centre' or 'owner', the filtering and encrypting abilities of the digital technology; the control structure that will play an efficient role in the minimization of the conflicts and disputes are in the circuit for maintaining the status quo.

On this slippery ground the main target of the strategy of politics with the mediation of the new media is to reach a synthesis between direct and representative democracy. But how and to what extent this will become a reality will be determined by the power struggle between the actors who will structure the strategy of politics, rather than by the instrumental potential of the new media in political communication. Within the context of this struggle, there are elements which define the new and flexible forms of making politics or which operate within the mediation of the opportunities of new media. These are structural flexibility in the political organisation, developing skills that will enable this, organizing persistent 'news attacks' which will create a counter-agendum against the monopolized information-news sources in terms of dominant media and establishing the social networks which are becoming new political forums.

Since in previous years during the direct interventions in the political power, the conditions of martial law gave to TAF the opportunity of limitless control over the news and when it wished to make its voice heard by the people it used the traditional media. In the case of the e-Memorandum, TAF, in its indirect intervention did not wish to use the traditional widespread media, which was in alliance with the political power. The reasons for this are firstly that the traditional-widespread media is locating itself as a political actor, is an element of force in Turkey and has the ability to shape the news according to its own viewpoint. Second, TAF's website, instead of the news, which can be changed by a third person in the dominant media, provides a communication environment where it can fully express itself. Third, the Internet, which has become a source of news and consequently the employees of the dominant-widespread media are constantly watching TAF's web site. Fourth the e-Memorandum also included a subsidiary aim of questioning the position and function of the dominant media. Finally, the e-Memorandum, posted on the Internet at an unexpected hour implemented an 'e-coup' on the traditional media. However, as previously mentioned, these elements gain value within the opportunities of TAF and of the social reality. In short, these are not instrumental opportunities, which any other institution can any time download and activate.

Success in the strategy of structuring politics depends on the strategic collaboration of social-political forces which has the unity of reason, will and interest and that is focused not on narrow but on broad interests. As can be said from the inverse, rulers do not rule because they know better but because they are stronger or as the dominant interests are better represented in their rules. According to Virillo (1998: 23-24) when, 'politics is taken from the hands of the people and it increasingly becomes determined by the army, state and technology... This causes a reduction in the meaningful public participation forms and an increase in the force and scope of the social elites'; he is indeed criticising the reductionist-superficial solutions of the kind mentioned above.

Thus, in the information era, the process of decision taking and application is related to those whose interests are dominant or to the section(s) where the unity of interest is stronger and is represented more strongly. In this context, even though new media provides opportunities for the elitist sections where the narrow interests are represented, the dominant-widespread media maintains its prevailing position by incorporating the new media in its field of work. Unquestionably the new media provides new opportunities for direct communication with the public and in some ways; it can bypass the dominant media or conventional news organisations. However, in spite of all the opportunities of the new media, in a society such as Turkey with its turbulent political history any e-coup initiative of TAF can reactivate memories of the previous coup d'états in the minds of the people. Thus, it can be said that although the new media can bring opportunities for flexible politics, it is questionable whether this was a success for a institution such as the military. In this case, taking into account the history and previous behaviour of TAF the use of a new media approach to convey their message is unlikely to signal a radical change in their political strategy, which is in fact to maintain the status quo.

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(Endnotes)

* <http://www.marketingturkiye.com/yeni/Haberler/NewsDetailed.aspx?id=15275>

** Zaman, Vakit, Yeni Şafak, Star, Sabah, STV, Kanal 7, TV Net, Kanal 24, Meltem TV etc.

*** Speech made by the then US Vice President Al Gore, during the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) meeting held in Buenos Aires in 1994, where he described the global information infrastructure (GII) as the new platform of the participatory democracy is very meaningful from this angle.