



ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ | RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE BOMBING OF GERNIKA IN THE TURKISH PRESS

Uğur SERÇE

Öğr. Gör. Dr., Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi, Biga Meslek Yüksekokulu,
ugurserce@yahoo.com

0000-0002-0915-5661

Atıf / Citation: Serçe, U. (2022). The bombing of Gernika in the Turkish Press. *İnönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, (İNİJOSS), 11(1), 182-195. <https://doi.org/10.54282/inijoss.1062673>

<https://doi.org/10.54282/inijoss.1062673>

Abstract

The attack on Gernika during the Spanish Civil War was one of the most critical events that caused great concern around the world. After the bombing, the town soon became one of the symbols of the Civil War. The complete destruction of a defenseless town in a short time caused deep anger against Franco's forces and the states behind them. The attack attracted interest in the Turkish press, where the news of the Civil War was followed closely. However, in reporting on the attack, Turkish newspapers had to comply with the non-intervention policy followed by Turkey, taking into account the Press Law. Drawing on the news after the Gernika bombing, this study examines the extent to which the Turkish press acted in line with the Turkish government's policy of non-intervention in the first weeks after the attack. In this context, news and columns on the Gernika bombing in *Cumhuriyet*, *Ulus*, *Tan* and *Haber* were examined in the study. It has been found in the study that the news about the Gernika attack had limited coverage in *Cumhuriyet* and *Ulus*, which were close to the government. On the other hand, in *Tan* and *Haber*, it was seen that the news about the attack was discussed in more detail. In addition, it has been noted that a pro-Republican attitude was clearly evident particularly in *Haber*, both in headlines and columns.

Key words: Gernika, Guernica, Non-intervention, Turkish press

TÜRK BASININDA GERNIKA BOMBARDIMANI

Öz

İspanya İç Savaşı sırasında Gernika'ya yapılan saldırı, savaşın dünya genelinde endişe yaratan en kritik gelişmelerinden birisiydi. Bombalamadan sonra şehir, kısa sürede İç Savaş'ın sembollerinden biri haline geldi. Savunmasız bir şehrin kısa sürede tamamen yok edilmesi, Francocu güçlere ve bunların arkasındaki devletlere karşı büyük bir öfkeye neden oldu. Gernika'ya yapılan saldırı, İç Savaş haberlerinin yakından takip edildiği Türk basınında da ilgiyle karşılandı. Ancak Türk gazeteleri, saldırıyı haberleştirirken, Türkiye'nin İç Savaş boyunca takip ettiği karışmazlık politikasına uymak; ilaveten, 1931 yılında yürürlüğe

konmuş olan Basın Kanunu'nu dikkate almak durumundaydı. Gernika'nın bombalanmasının ardından yapılan haberlerden yola çıkılarak hazırlanan bu çalışmada, saldırıdan sonraki ilk haftalarda Türk basınının Türk hükümetinin karışmazlık politikası ile ne ölçüde uyum içerisinde hareket ettiği incelenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Gernika bombardımanına ilişkin olarak *Cumhuriyet*, *Ulus*, *Tan* ve *Haber*'de yer alan haberler ve köşe yazıları, çalışmadaki temel inceleme unsurlarını teşkil etmektedir. Yapılan incelemede, Gernika saldırısına ilişkin haberlerin, iktidara yakın olan *Cumhuriyet* ve *Ulus* gazetelerinde sınırlı ölçüde yer tuttuğu, ayrıca bu gazetelerde yer alan haberlerde tarafsız bir dil kullanılmaya gayret edildiği tespit edilmiştir. Buna karşılık, *Tan* ve *Haber*'de, saldırıya ilişkin haberlerin daha ayrıntılı bir biçimde ele alındığı görülmüştür. İlaveten, özellikle *Haber*'de, Cumhuriyetçilerden yana bir tutumun, gerek başlıklarla gerekse de köşe yazıları aracılığıyla açık bir biçimde ortaya konulduğu tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Gernika, Guernica, Karışmazlık, Türk basını

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Civil War in Spain in July 1936 caused great concern in many European states. Britain and France, soon after the outbreak of the war, began to make an effort to prevent the spread of the war across Europe. It was mainly the United Kingdom (UK) that made efforts in this direction. The British government, which was in favor of keeping its distance from both the legitimate government of Spain and those rebelling against the Republic, also prevented France from supporting the Spanish Republic. Thus, the decision to impose a unilateral arms embargo against the Republicans and the Nationalists came first from Great Britain. Following the British decision of July 31, the French government announced a similar decision on August 8, 1936 (Whealey, 1971: 220). The creation of the Non-Intervention Committee, which began its work in September with the participation of representatives of 27 governments, ensured coordination among the states on the arms embargo. However, from the beginning of the Committee, there were doubts that Germany and Italy, which were among the Committee's members, would comply with the Committee's decisions (Bell, 1958: 75-76). As a matter of fact, these two states, which supported the Nationalists from the beginning of the war, continued to act against the Committee's decisions in the following months.

On the other hand, Turkey, which was among the members of the Non-Intervention Committee, followed a course of action in line with the principles of non-intervention throughout the war. At the beginning of September 1936, Turkey banned the transportation of all types of weapons, ammunition and military equipment, finished or disassembled aircraft and all types of warships, directly or in transit from Turkey to Spain (Birlik, 2016: 127-128). There was no record of any complaint against Turkey for supplying war material to the Republicans or the Nationalists during the war (Güçlü, 2002: 54). When the Non-Intervention Committee passed a resolution prohibiting the sending of volunteers to Spain in February 1937, Turkey acted accordingly. The Turkish government took a decision on the matter on February 20, 1937, just after this decision was accepted by the committee. In the decision taken, it was stated that the participation of Turkish citizens was not appropriate to help both sides in the ongoing war in Spain, that the recruitment of nationals and foreigners for this purpose was forbidden and that the necessary measures would be taken against those who left despite this prohibition (Birlik, 2016: 128).

The policy of the Turkish government during the Civil War was reflected in the Turkish press throughout the war. In general, news about the war tended to use moderate language. The events

of the war, especially in newspapers close to the government, were transmitted including information from both sides as far as possible. However, despite the existence of a strict press law, there were also newspapers with a discourse close to the Republicans in their publications. The bombing of Gernika, which took place on 26 April 1937 and caused great indignation, created an environment in which the reaction against the rebels could be expressed more clearly in the newspapers close to the Republicans. This study, based on the news after the Gernika bombing, will discuss to what extent the Turkish press acted in harmony with the Turkish government's policy of non-intervention. In this context, the news and columns about the bombing of Gernika in *Cumhuriyet*, *Ulus*, *Tan* and *Haber (Akşam Postası)*¹ will be examined. To this end, the study will first provide general information about the bombing of Gernika. Then, the newspapers examined in the study will be briefly presented. Subsequently, the publications of the newspapers studied in relation to the bombing will be examined under three main headings: "News Coverage of the Bombing", "Denial by Germany and the Francoists", "The Columnists and the Bombing".

It should be noted that, the news and columns in the Turkish press about the Spanish Civil War have been the subject of some researches in the past.² In these studies, the reactions to the attack in Gernika were included in a very limited way, and no evaluation was made of this topic as it was not the main subject of the study. Therefore, a detailed analysis of how the Gernika attack was covered in the Turkish press is missing. This study argues that it is a step towards eliminating this gap.

1. THE BOMBING

The bombing of Gernika on April 26, 1937, was one of the most horrifying events of the war in Spain. At that day, Gernika was destroyed by a continuous bombing attack by German Condor Legion and the Italian Aviazione Legionaria that lasted about three hours. The town was defenseless and lacked anti-aircraft protection (Preston, 2012: 15-16). In addition to the twenty-two German and three Italian medium bombers involved in the attack, the town was also shot down by fighter planes in an attempt to stop traffic. The incendiary bombs caused great destruction in the town, the fire could not be controlled since the fire trucks took a long time to reach the town from Bilbao (Payne, 2012: 211). The Basque government announced that 1,645 people were killed in the attack after the bombing. As a result of future investigations, 154 deaths were detected. The estimate for today is that there were around 200 deaths in total in the attack (Preston, 2012: 17-18).

As many researches about the attack have shown, the bombing of Gernika occurred with the knowledge and consent of General Emilio Mola, Nationalist Commander-in-Chief on the Northern Front. The reason the town was targeted was because it was located in an area necessary for the withdrawal of the Basque forces (Corum, 1995: 71-72). Gernika was just over 10 km from the front, with three Basque battalions and a munitions factory, next to a bridge where part of the

¹ Hereafter *Haber*.

² These works include the master's thesis of Seçil Aladağ, the master's thesis of Merve Aydın and the research of Carmen Uriarte. Sabit Dokuyan and Murat Sıtkı Karabulut also examined the reflections of the developments in the first months of the Spanish Civil War in the Turkish press. As only the developments in 1936 were examined in this study, news of the Gernika attack was not included.

Basque army had to withdraw, so the nationalists set Gernika as a military objective (Payne, 2012: 210). The attack reached its objective and the area was closed to traffic for a day. It took only four days for Gernika to fall after the attack. In this way, the air bombing resulted as expected by Colonel Wolfram von Richtofen, the planner of the raid (Corum, 1995: 71-72).

After its bombardment, Gernika quickly became one of the symbols of the fascist brutality. There was a lot of news about it in the press of many countries. Pablo Picasso's painting of Guernica, exhibited at the 1937 Paris World's Fair, was instrumental in making the attack on the town known around the world in the decades that followed (Payne, 2012: 212).³ By the time of the bombing, however, the attack on Gernika had already caused outrage in many countries. British correspondent George Steer's report from the town was widely reported in the press, diplomatic circles and politicians. The report was the most high-profile news story in the world. It is also worth noting that the anger in the international press over the attack was not limited to the left-wing press. There was also a serious reaction to the Gernika bombing in the moderate newspapers (Monteath, 1987: 80). The complete destruction of a defenceless city in a short time left a deep wound especially in Europe. The rage felt by the antifascists was exacerbated by the efforts of the Francoist fighters to deny responsibility (Preston, 2012: 21-22).

The Gernika bombing, although at a lower level than it received in some countries, got considerable attention in the Turkish press. At this point, before starting to examine how the attack unfolded in the Turkish press, it would be useful to briefly mention some information about the newspapers examined in the study.

2. EXAMINED NEWSPAPERS

Tan

Tan was published between 1935-1945.⁴ It is not possible to argue that the newspaper had a particular line of publication in late April and May 1937, which is investigated in this study. Despite the liberal tendencies of Ahmet Emin Yalman, the paper's editor-in-chief, Ömer Rıza Doğrul, who wrote foreign policy articles for the paper, was an Islamist. Among the newspaper's writers, those on the left were also influential. Zekeriya Sertel was a socialist and Sabiha Sertel was a communist (Öztekin, 2013: 116-117). Despite the differences of opinion, the newspaper was generally in line with the regime at the times under study. In relation to this situation, *Tan* tried to present the developments in the Spanish Civil War in a balanced way. However, it was also clear that the newspaper was on the side of the Republicans.

Cumhuriyet

Cumhuriyet was formed with the aim of bringing the republican regime that was proclaimed after the War of Independence to larger sections of the population. The newspaper acted on this

³ Payne points out that Picasso did not prepare this painting inspired by the bombing. The painter, who was asked for a work for the Fair, began preparing a painting in early 1937 to reveal the horrors of war, and then gave his work this name after the bombing of Gernika in late March (Payne, 2012: 212).

⁴ In November 1938, the paper came under the control of the Sertels and from that date onwards it was seen as a left-wing paper. The newspaper, which criticised the anti-democratic practices of the regime, differed from the Turkish press in general by displaying an openly pro-USSR stance at the end of the Second World War (Öztekin, 2013: 93).

mission following its foundation on May 7, 1924. *Cumhuriyet*, whose name was decided by Atatürk himself, followed a publishing line that was very compatible with the government until Atatürk's death (Kaya, 2010: 76-78). With these characteristics, *Cumhuriyet* was a key publication in understanding the overall policy direction of the government during the 1930s, both domestically and internationally.

Ulus

Ulus was the official paper of the Republican People's Party (CHP). The newspaper was founded in 1920 during the Turkish War of Independence under the name Hakimiyet-i Milliye (National Sovereignty). Its purpose was to announce the objectives of the national liberation war and the activities carried out throughout the country. It began publishing under the name *Ulus* on November 28, 1934. From that date until 1971, when it was closed down, it served as the voice of the CHP (Heper and Criss, 2009: 202; Topuz, 1973: 159). The newspaper, whose editor-in-chief was Falih Rıfki Atay, who was also the CHP's deputy speaker in Ankara, was the paper most in line with Turkey's cautious foreign policy during the civil war. The most striking thing about the newspaper was that it was excessively careful to convey the events of the Civil War from both sides' perspectives.

Haber

Published by Hasan Rasim Us, *Haber* was a daily newspaper whose first issue was published on 11 January 1932. The newspaper was published every day at 4pm. It mainly adopted the aim of spreading the modernisation of the Republic to the public (Sarı, 2019: 97-98).⁵ During the period examined in this study, *Haber* was the Turkish newspaper most openly supportive of the Republicans. The paper demonstrated its Republican stance both with its news headlines, with the emphases it highlighted in its columns, and with the articles it preferred to translate from the foreign press. Moreover, unlike other Turkish newspapers of the time, it was common to find harsh statements about Franco and his supporters in the paper.

3. THE BOMBING AND THE TURKISH PRESS

a. News Coverage of the Bombing

In the Turkish press, among the newspapers surveyed in this paper, *Haber's* articles are the ones that draw the strongest reaction to the bombing of Gernika. As mentioned earlier, *Haber* sided with the Republicans in news about the Civil War. This contributed to the fact that the bombing of Gernika was reported in more detail in the newspaper compared to other Turkish newspapers. Since *Haber* had the advantage of being an evening paper, the news about the Gernika attack was published in *Haber* before other newspapers. On 27th of April, it was stated in *Haber* that rebel airplanes rained bombs on Gernika for three and a half hours without

⁵ It should be noted that although *Haber* and *Tan* were not in serious opposition to the regime and generally acted in harmony with the government, one could often find the country's problems in these newspapers. Moreover, investigations were occasionally launched against these newspapers for publishing 'banned' topics. A news item about one of these investigations can be seen in the *Son Telgraf* in April 1937 (*Son Telgraf*, 28 April 1937: 3). It is also known that *Tan* was closed for three months in 1938 because of an article about Atatürk's health (Öztekin, 2013: 117-118).

interruption, and hundreds of people were killed. According to the news, the town was just a pile of stones and earth. Destroyed houses blocked almost all the streets. The news also stated that the oak tree⁶ in front of the former Basque parliament was miraculously intact (*Haber*, 27 April 1937: 6). This Reuters report was shared by several Turkish newspapers the following day.

Haber, later reported on the attack on Gernika on 29 April 1937 in detail, announced the bombing with a long headline that began with "The Rebels' Atrocity" (*Haber*, 29 April 1937: 1).⁷ The content of the news consisted mainly of the Basque leader's statement and the information conveyed by the Reuters correspondent. According to the report, the civilian population of the defenceless town of Gernika had been subjected to three and a half hours of intense and violent bombardment by aircraft belonging to enemy forces. The air raid was carried out especially on a day when villagers came to the town to sell their goods. The town, where no military action was available, was turned into a heap of rubble in the face of the attacks, and thousands of survivors left the town as quickly as possible (*Haber*, 29 April 1937: 4).

It should be noted that the source of foreign news in Turkish newspapers at that time was mainly Anadolu Agency (AA). The newspapers published the news of the Agency according to their political orientation, which led to differences in both the photographs used and the prominent emphases. On the other hand, AA, the source of foreign news, did not have a news network abroad. What the Agency did was essentially to translate news from foreign agencies and distribute it to the Turkish media (Manka, 2008: 77). In this respect, the source of *Haber's* Gernika story, dated April 29, 1937, was AA and its international sources. The newspaper revealed its position on the bombing with the terms chosen specifically for the subheadings. For example, the Basque leader's statement in the newspaper was quoted in the subhead, with the phrase "the civilised world" in quotation marks and with an exclamation mark at the end. The subheading chosen by *Haber* for a report from *The Times* on the attack on Gernika was "An event that does not exist in military history". Additionally, in the subheading of the Reuters story, the phrase "Nationalists" used for Franco's forces was used in quotation marks. The editors of the newspaper were not pleased that the expression "nationalists", to which they attributed a positive connotation, was associated with Franco's forces.

Haber's transcript, dated 29 April 1937, also detailed the statements of the Reuters correspondent in Gernika:

"The ruthless destruction of Gernika, the Basque holy city, by rebel planes will instill in the heart of every Basque an eternal grudge against General Mola and his supporters. According to the information received, the planes also bombed and burned individual farms within an eight-kilometre radius of the city. Even flocks of sheep have been affected by mitral fever. The convent of Santa Clara, which was used as a hospital, was destroyed with 42 injured. The air raid took place on Sunday when villagers descended on the town to sell their goods." (...) I found an unexploded incendiary bomb. It weighed eight hundred grams and had a German mark on it. Gernika was a completely defenseless city. They had no artillery against planes or air raids. Only three or five houses were left standing. A city of 10,000 people

⁶ The oak tree in front of the parliament, called "Gernikako Arbola" in Basque, symbolises traditional Basque freedoms.

⁷ The rest of the headline was as follows: "In a way that makes people feel disgust for humanity... A historic town with its women working in the fields, its hospitals, its grazing sheep and newlywed couples was destroyed by German bombs."

became a smoking pile of rubble. As the roads are impassable, the number of those left under the rubble is not known. Many of the dead will not be found, as many of the buildings have been burned to the ground.

Two young people, who had just got married that day, were found dead in their beds among the flowers. Several bodies recovered from the rubble were dismembered. Thousands of people who fled Gernika are now in Bilbao. Villagers from the surrounding area fled here. According to the villagers' accounts, the planes also killed the women working in the fields by machine-gunning"

Other Turkish newspapers had actually received the same Reuters story from AA. However, this report received limited coverage in pro-government newspapers. This was due to the strong concern of these newspapers to act in harmony with foreign policy. This will become more clear in the following paragraphs, when the limited information in the news of the newspapers *Ulus* and *Cumhuriyet* from the same source is revealed.

Tan, another paper where a Republican attitude could be found among the newspapers reviewed, first announced the Gernika attack on 28 April 1937. As the details reached the Turkish press the next day, the news about Gernika on the 28th of April was limited to a few lines in *Tan*. In the news titled "A big town is devastated in flames", the Reuters report, which also appeared in *Haber* on 27 April, was shared (*Tan*, 28 April 1937: 3). The violence of the Gernika attack and the reactions it caused were discussed in more detail in the news of 29 April in *Tan*. This was the Reuters story that *Haber* shared on the same day, but it was somewhat limited. The headline directly targeted the Nationalist forces: "The brutality of the rebels created horror." The news also reported that the bombing was met with hatred and condemnation in British, French and Soviet newspapers (*Tan*, 29 April 1937: 3). While the news about Gernika in *Tan* in the first two days was on the inside pages of the newspaper, on April 30, the bombing was in the headlines for the first time: "300,000 people in Spain in danger of death! The brutality of the rebels was so ferocious!..." In the subheading, just below the headline, appeared the following statement, "The Francoists cut up the poor women and children with machine-gunning!" (*Tan*, 30 April 1937: 1).

In *Tan* news reports, some harsh reactions from the United States and Britain to the attack could also be seen. For example, a subheading entitled "The Town Chosen for Massacre" on May 8 included statements by U.S. Senator Borah on "the fighting methods of the fascists." The speech quoted by the newspaper included the following statements by the senator: "I cannot find words to describe the scenes that took place in Gernika. This town is a glaring example of a whole series of atrocities. No military reason can justify the attack on this open town, which was chosen for the bloodiest massacre of the century. This is a method of military dispatch practiced by the fascists." (*Tan*, 8 May 1937: 10). The preference for such dispatches from abroad was significant to show the newspaper's position.

The bombing of Gernika had much more limited coverage in *Ulus* compared to *Haber* and *Tan*. In *Ulus*, the news of 28 April 1937 included the Reuters story on the air raid in a rather simplified form. While at the same date *Tan* revealed the horror of the bombing in the town with both the headline and the information between the lines, *Ulus*, using the same source, included the bombing in other news about the Civil War with just a few lines. It was seen that the impact of the attack on the town was also mentioned in a very limited way in *Ulus* (*Ulus*, 28 April 1937: 3). In the April 29 issue of *Ulus*, the news about the bombing of Gernika was not covered under a

separate heading, but again in other news about the Civil War. The impressions of the Reuters reporter's, which were also reported in other Turkish newspapers, were relayed to readers with the subheading "Details of the Gernika bombing" (*Ulus*, 29 April 1937: 3). However, Reuters news in *Ulus* was far behind the ones in *Haber* and *Tan*. As stated above, as of April 29, 1937, the reports submitted to the press by AA contained quite detailed information about the Gernika attack. Nevertheless, in line with the government's policy of "non-intervention", *Ulus* avoided highlighting the attack and thus taking a stand against the rebels. As a result of this, while there was a reactive style to the attack with headlines or occasional expressions in *Haber* and *Tan*, there was no such style in *Ulus*.⁸

As for *Cumhuriyet*, on the other hand, this newspaper, although not as strict as *Ulus*, also showed a line that was in harmony with Turkish foreign policy. The Gernika attack was first announced in *Cumhuriyet*, as in many Turkish newspapers, on April 28. In the news, some information about the attack on Gernika was conveyed, with the same expressions in *Tan* of the same date (*Cumhuriyet*, 28 April 1937: 1,7) On April 29, as in other Turkish newspapers, the details of the attack were also published this time in *Cumhuriyet* (*Cumhuriyet*, 29 April 1937: 1,9). Although *Cumhuriyet* maintained close relations with the regime, it was seen to be somewhat more flexible in reporting the news compared to *Ulus*. The main difference in the newspaper from *Tan* and *Haber* was in the selected headlines and subheadings. While *Tan* and *Haber* presented an approach to the civil war with headlines that emphasized brutality, *Cumhuriyet* presented its readers with news from the same source with much simpler and more disinterested headlines. In addition, expressions such as "fascists" or "traitors", used in *Tan* and *Haber* and aimed at Francoists directly or through quotations from foreign press, have not been included in *Cumhuriyet*.

b. Denial By Germany and the Francoists

After the bombing of Gernika, several European and American newspapers accused the Germans of carrying out the bombing. This situation created serious problems for German diplomats because Germany was a member of the Non-Intervention Committee at that time and German troops were not officially present in Spain. To get out of the embarrassing situation, the Germans began to deny reports that they were responsible for the bombing of Gernika. This was supported by ultra-conservative circles in Britain and France. In early May, some European correspondents in Spain reported that the destruction of the town was not due to the air raid. Meanwhile, nationalists in Spain claimed that Gernika had been destroyed by the retreating Republicans (Monteath, 1987: 81-82).

In the first days after the attack, it was seen that a part of the Turkish press showed a sensitive attitude in associating the attack with Germany. In many Turkish newspapers on April 29, 1937, details of the Gernika bombing were included in the news received from Reuters through the AA, and the horror of the bombing was presented to the readers more clearly than the news of the previous day. An important point that attracted attention in this story was the statements of the

⁸ An exception to this can be seen in the report of 7 May 1937 on the women and children who were evacuated from Bilbao (*Ulus*, 7 May 1937: 3).

Reuters reporter about an unexploded incendiary bomb he claimed to have found in the town. According to the news item, the bomb weighing eight hundred grams was of German origin. This information, which appeared in *Cumhuriyet* (29 April 1937: 9) and *Haber* (29 April 1937: 4), was not included in *Ulus* of the same date. It should also be noted that *Haber* not only passed on this claim by the Reuters correspondent, but carried it under its headline in the front page. Thus, readers of this newspaper encountered the claim that the attack on the town was carried out by German bombs in the paper's first detailed story on Gernika.

Claims and rebuttals about which forces realized the attack and how it was carried out began to appear more and more in Turkish newspapers in the following days. In *Tan*, dated April 30, 1937, there appeared a report by the Bilbao reporter of the Reuters claiming to have seen 214 German warplanes during the air raid on Gernika (*Tan*, 30 April 1937: 1).⁹ When such allegations were made, the most cautious attitude in the debate about who carried out the bombing in Gernika was not surprisingly observed in *Ulus*. Although *Ulus*, like other Turkish newspapers, received the first news of the bombing from Reuters via AA, it did not include the reporter's claim that the bombs were of German origin. Nor was the claim that the town was hit by German planes reported. When German newspapers began to disapprove such claims, these rebuttals were included in the newspaper without wasting time. For example, news about the Civil War published in *Ulus* on April 30, 1937, included the denial by German newspapers that the claims that Gernika was destroyed with the help of German planes and by Franco's forces did not reflect the truth. According to the German newspapers, these claims constituted a new anti-German propaganda slander (*Ulus*, 30 April 1937: 3). In fact, this situation led to the appearance of an interesting picture. That is, when *Ulus* published the disclaimer of the German newspapers, it had not announced to its readers the news that Gernika was bombed by German warplanes. In this sense, *Ulus* readers learned of the claim that the Gernika bombing was carried out by German forces, with the refutation of the claim.

In the days that followed, news of the debate about the perpetrators of the Gernika attack in *Ulus* continued to take part in the agenda. The news from Vitoria on 2 May 1937, for example, included a report that Gernika's "deliberate destruction" was causing anger in Franco's Spain. The news included allegations in newspapers in the parts of the Basque Country occupied by Franco's forces, claiming that the Biscayan government in the Basque Country was responsible for the destruction of the town. According to the claim in the news, with this disaster the governments wanted to show the Franco's forces that if they took the town they would get nothing but ruins (*Ulus*, 2 May 1937: 3). On May 4, *Cumhuriyet* reported that some French newspapers claimed that Gernika was destroyed by Marxists (*Cumhuriyet*, 4 May 1937: 1,8). On May 7, *Ulus* again reported that *Times* reporters contradicted each other on who destroyed Gernika (*Ulus*, 7 May 1937: 3).

Another critical point where there were differences in the approach to the Civil War among the Turkish newspapers examined is terms used to describe the parties to the war. In *Tan*, for example, the Republicans were often referred to as "the legitimate government", or "the legitimate

⁹ In this story, the Reuters reporter had actually mentioned the types of German aircraft to the Agency (Heinkel He-111 and Junkers Ju-52 bombers and Heinkel He-51 fighters). However, a subeditor, who thought this was the number of the fighter aircraft, wrote that 214 German warplanes were involved in the attack (Holme, 1995: 48).

Spain".¹⁰ *Ulus*, on the other hand, generally divided the warring sides as "pro-governments" and "rebels". Given that Turkey still officially recognised the Republican government at the time, such a division could be considered normal. On the other hand, the news in *Ulus* usually conveyed the developments of the war from the point of view of both sides, with expressions or subtitles such as "reported by government sources", "reported by rebel sources." In *Cumhuriyet*, expressions such as "Franco's forces" and "insurgents" appeared frequently, in addition to expressions such as "pro-governments" and "rebels". In *Haber*, where a strong pro-republican attitude was observed, Franco's forces were generally referred to as "rebels" as in the Turkish press, but there were usually harsh statements that accompanied this, and some examples of these are given in the study. As for *Haber*, it should also be noted that the first photograph from the Gernika in the period under study was published in this newspaper. Underneath the photograph, on the front page of 3 May 1937, was the following: "Gernika was a town of ten thousand inhabitants before it was attacked by rebel-controlled aircraft, now it is a ruin" (*Haber*, 3 May 1937: 1). *Tan* also published a photo taken in Gernika after the bombing in its 9 May issue. Under the photo on the front page were the words: 'A corner from the desolate and empty Gernika, brutally bombed and destroyed by rebel planes' (*Tan*, 9 May 1937: 1). In the news from Spain on the same day, *Tan*'s attitude towards the rebels was also more direct: "The rebels, who completely burned Gernika and attacked the civilian population with machine-gun fire, are as if frightened by their disaster, saying with devotion that they do not attack such open cities. In this way they publish news to eliminate antipathy towards them all over the world." In *Cumhuriyet* and *Ulus*, which broadcast in accordance with the principles of non-intervention adopted by the Turkish government in foreign policy, such expressions were avoided. In addition, there were no photographs of Gernika on the pages of these newspapers at that time.

c. The Columnists and the Bombing

The bombing of Gernika was not the subject of many columns in the Turkish press during the period in question. In the newspapers surveyed, there were indeed foreign policy writers who often included developments surrounding the Spanish Civil War in their articles. However, the majority of these columnists either only included the Gernika bombing between the lines in their writings or they did not include it at all. This situation was largely shaped by the newspapers' relations with the government and their publishing policies. Moreover, the Press Law, passed in 1931, had an undeniable impact on the formation of such an attitude among the press. This law contained articles that prevented newspapers and magazines from carrying out political broadcasts. For example, it was forbidden to carry publications that "provoked communism and anarchism". In addition, newspapers and magazines could be closed down by decision of the Council of Ministers for publishing policies that were not in line with the general policy of the country. It was also forbidden by law for those responsible for the closed newspapers to later publish a newspaper under a different name (Topuz, 1973: 151-152).

As mentioned earlier, *Haber* was the one where a pro-Republican stance was most evident during the Spanish Civil War among the newspapers surveyed. *Haber*'s Republican attitude was sometimes accompanied by an angry tone toward the Nationalist forces. One of the most striking

¹⁰ For such examples, see the following issues of the newspaper: 7 May 1937, 24 May 1937, 1 June 1937.

examples of this can be found in Şekip Gündüz's article of 26 April 1937, when the rebels laid siege to Bilbao. Gündüz, who wrote foreign policy articles for the paper, referred to Franco as "the greatest traitor of this century" noting that the Basque state's fight against the rebels in Bilbao was followed with sympathy by those who "do not want to give up hope for the continued existence of humanity". Gündüz was also certain that the Republicans would ultimately prevail; and the last thing that awaited Franco was "to be crushed and dragged from street to street by his own mercenaries" (Gündüz, 26 April 1937, 2).

Not surprisingly, Şekip Gündüz's reaction to the bombing of Gernika was also harsh. In his article of 30 April 1937, Gündüz expressed his reaction to Franco and his supporters:

"There are no words left for the Francoists. The word, which can be the bearer of the sweetest compliment, the sourest sarcasm and adulation, the bitterest and most unbearable insult, has lost all expression in the wretched Spanish countries under the rule of this wicked adventurer." (Gündüz, 30 April 1937, 2).

Gündüz's article was also noteworthy because it contained a criticism not easily seen in the Turkish press. This criticism was directed at AA, the official state agency, which was the source of news from Spain. Gündüz was uncomfortable with the language used by the Agency and the way the events were reported. AA was mentioned in Gündüz's article with the words "more than anyone else, it knows how to deprive the Turkish language of its eloquence." The author seemed to expect, at least in such a case, that AA would not choose a raw report of what had happened. However, according to Gündüz, even this choice of the Agency did not diminish the impact on readers of what happened in Gernika. The brutality of Gernika had created "a literary miracle that gripped people from every sore spot and sensitive vein even in Anadolu Agency's bulletin".

In line with editorial policy, *Tan* reacted to the Gernika bombing but, compared to *Haber*, used more attentive language. Ömer Rıza Doğrul, who wrote articles on foreign policy in *Tan*, wrote several articles on the situation in Spain during the Civil War. Doğrul was generally pro-Republican. However, it was also seen that the author expressed this position in a sober language. During the period under study, Doğrul wrote only one article that directly addressed the Gernika attack. In his article of 2 May 1937, Doğrul wrote that the bombing of Gernika "as if it had been wiped off the face of the earth" had great effects on the whole of civilisation and humanity, and stated that the effects deepened as the details of the attack emerged. In his article, in which he also mentioned the moral and historical value of the town of Gernika for the Basques, Doğrul argued that the aim of the attack on this town was to intimidate and destroy the Basque nation. But contrary to what was intended, the bombing "fuelled the national anger" of the Basques, Doğrul wrote. According to him, "there was no strategic necessity to burn down this defenseless town", and "there was no reason to follow the defenseless people into the fields and scythe them with the machine-guns and scorch the poor hospitalized ones in hellfire" (Doğrul, 2 May 1937: 3).

In contrast to *Haber* and *Tan*, there was not even a column partially evaluating this event after the bombing of Gernika in *Ulus*. In this paper, foreign policy articles were written by Ahmet Şükrü Esmer at the time. In his articles, Esmer generally referred to developments in intergovernmental relations and kept his own assessments limited. The limited comments of Esmer, who would also become a CHP deputy between 1939-1943, were completely in line with Turkey's foreign policy

during the Civil War years. For example, Esmer, in his column dated May 25, 1937, stated that a cease-fire was the best option under the present circumstances (Esmer, 25 May 1937: 3). Likewise, Esmer's article of June 3 dealt with a similar theme (Esmer, 3 June 1937: 3). Just as Turkey tried to have relations with both sides during the Civil War,¹¹ *Ulus* tried to convey the events in Spain from the eyes of Republicans and Nationalists. In this sense, it should come as no surprise that the only lines in Esmer's writings in which Gernika appeared during the period under analysis were also a column in which he spoke about the bias of the press. According to Esmer, who spoke of a worldwide press crisis in one of his articles entitled "International Press Warfare", each newspaper reported events from its own perspective and the public was deceived. Esmer cited the Gernika bombing as an example of this type of conflict, noting that British newspapers wrote in detail that Gernika was destroyed by German planes, while German newspapers did not accept that there were German planes in Spain. For him, the most important thing was that people knew what was really happening (Esmer, 11 May 1937: 3). Muharrem Feyzi Togay, the foreign policy writer for the *Cumhuriyet*, also wrote many articles on the Spanish Civil War, as did Esmer. However, as in *Ulus*, in accordance with the general trend of the newspaper, the events were reported without adding any significant comments in *Cumhuriyet*. This was probably the reason why an event like the bombing of Gernika, which is not easy to convey without comment, was not included in Togay's columns.

Among the newspapers surveyed, it should be noted that *Haber* also clearly revealed its general attitude towards the Spanish Civil War through translations of articles from the foreign press. An important example was a commentary from the *News Chronicle* of 1 May 1937 on the attack on Gernika. The article referred to the rebels as "Spanish fascists" and stated that the massacre in Gernika could not be accepted as part of the war. The commentary reported that children and women were murdered in plain view in Gernika, that defenceless people were followed out into the fields and shot with machine guns and that the wounded were burned alive in hospitals. It was stressed that none of the actions were related to military demands. The article also called for sanctions against the rebel forces for the bombing in Gernika (*Haber*, 1 May 1937, 2).

CONCLUSION

During the Spanish Civil War, the attack on Gernika was one of the most striking events, causing deep discontent in Europe and provoking an outpouring of anger against Franco's forces. The intense destruction of a defenceless city in just a few hours caused a huge reaction not only in Europe but also in areas outside Europe, particularly in the USA. Anger against the Francoists and the German forces, seen as the main force behind them, increased as the rebels tried to avoid taking responsibility. During this period, news and photographs from Gernika appeared in many newspapers in the international press, with angry expressions against Franco's forces and an anti-fascist rhetoric.

¹¹ Although Turkey officially recognized the Franco government on March 8, 1939, it actually recognized the Burgos government in early 1938. In this case, the influence of British practice in the same direction was largely the decisive factor (Uriarte, 1995: 125-127).

In the Turkish press, where developments concerning the Spanish civil war took place almost daily, the news of the attack on Gernika occupied a significant place for a few days after the attack. However, compared to the impact of the attack in Europe, the reaction in the Turkish press was relatively weak. It can be argued that the restrictions on press freedom were effective in this case. Considering the Press Law of 1931, which was in force at the time, it was not possible for newspapers to publish completely outside of official policy. Since many newspaper owners were also members of the CHP, the only political party in the country, one could not expect an unusual attitude from newspapers in general. At the same time, prominent columnists also had close contacts with the Party. This situation was quite evident in *Ulus* and *Cumhuriyet*, which are among the newspapers examined. In this respect, the attack on Gernika was covered in a limited way by pro-government newspapers in an environment where the government followed a neutral policy. On the other hand, journalists who had no such affinity with the CHP were able to act more freely. In *Tan* and in *Haber*, sympathy for the Republicans in Spain could be expressed more clearly. Similarly, the dislike for the Franco's forces was also revealed by the headlines used in the news and the emphases especially in *Haber*. Among the examples in the Turkish press examined for the study, the fact that the two newspapers in question had a slightly more distant relationship with the political elite was the factor that allowed them to pursue an editorial policy that was incompatible with Turkish foreign policy. I should also note that the fact that the Turkish government was still officially recognizing the Republican government at the time of the review was a factor that facilitated the production of such news in *Tan* and *Haber*.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declared no potential conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Support Financing Information: The author has received no financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Ethics Committee Decision: For this research, ethical permission (dated-numbered) was not required.

REFERENCES

- Aladağ, S. (2011). *İspanya İç Savaşı ve Türkiye* [Master's thesis, Ege Üniversitesi]. <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/>
- Aydın, M. (2020). *Türk basınında Franco ve İspanya İç Savaşı* [Master's thesis, Yeditepe Üniversitesi]. <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/>
- Bell, J. B. (1958). *The non-intervention committee and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* [Doctoral dissertation, Duke University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (301939084). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/non-intervention-committee-spanish-civil-war-1936/docview/301939084/se-2?accountid=15572>
- Birlik, G.K. (2016). İspanya iç savaşında (1936-1939) Türkiye'nin dış politikası, *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 12(24), 122-155.
- Corum, J. S. (1995). The luftwaffe and the coalition air war in Spain, 1936-1939, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 18(1), 68-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402399508437580>
- Cumhuriyet* (26/04/1937 – 07/06/1937)
- Doğrul, Ö.R. (1937). İspanya şimalindeki muharebeler, *Tan*, 2 May, 3.
- Dokuyan, S., & Karabulut, M.S. (2019). İspanya İç Savaşı'nın başlaması ve Türk basınındaki yansımaları (1936), *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi*, 6(4), 1886-1915.
- Esmer, A.Ş. (1937). Enternasyonel matbuat harbi, *Ulus*, 11 May, 3.
- Esmer, A.Ş. (1937). İspanya ateşi alevlendi, *Ulus*, 3 June, 3.
- Esmer, A.Ş. (1937). İspanya harbını nihayetlendirmek için, *Ulus*, 25 May, 3.

- Güçlü, Y. (2002). The Nyon arrangement of 1937 and Turkey, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38(1), 53-70.
- Gündüz, Ş. (1937). "Bilbao...", *Haber*, 26 April, 2.
- Gündüz, Ş. (1937). "Hiperit Geliyor!", *Haber*, 30 April, 2.
Haber (Akşam Postası) (26/04/1937 – 07/06/1937)
- Heper, M., & Criss, N.B. (2009). *Historical dictionary of Turkey*. The Scarecrow Press.
- Holme, C. (1995). The reporter at Guernica, *British Journalism Review*, 6(2), 46-51.
- Kaya, A.E.E. (2010). Cumhuriyet Gazetesi'nin kuruluşundan günümüze kısa tarihi, *İletişim Fakültesi Dergisi*, <https://www.acarindex.com/dosyalar/makale/acarindex1423905513.pdf>
- Manka, A.G. (2008). *İkinci Dünya Savaşı yıllarında Anadolu Ajansı'nın dış haber politikası* [Doctoral dissertation, Ankara Üniversitesi]. <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/>
- Monteath, P. (1987). Guernica reconsidered: Fifty years of evidence, *War & Society*, 5(1), 79-104.
<https://doi.org/10.1179/106980487790305120>
- Öztekin, H. (2013). *Tan (1938-1945): Serteller yönetiminde muhalif bir gazetenin tarihi* [Doctoral dissertation, Erciyes Üniversitesi]. <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/>
- Payne, S. G. (2012). *The Spanish Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Preston, P. (2012). *The destruction of Guernica*. HarperPress e-books.
- Sarı, S. (2019). *Gazeteci Us ailesi ve modernleşme* [Doctoral dissertation, Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi]. <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/>
- Tan* (26/04/1937 – 07/06/1937)
- Topuz, H. (1973). *100 soruda Türk basın tarihi*. Gerçek Yayınevi.
- Ulus* (26/04/1937 – 07/06/1937)
- Uriarte, C. (1995). *Las relaciones hispano-turcas durante la Guerra Civil Española: 1936-1939*. Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores Centro de Documentación y Publicaciones.
- Whealey, R.H. (1971). Foreign intervention in the Spanish Civil War. R. Carr (Ed.), *The Republic and the Civil War in Spain*, (pp.213-238). Macmillan St Martin's Press.