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THE FRENCH MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE TURKISH FAILED COUP: ANALYTICAL STUDY OF LE MONDE NEWSPAPER

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the media coverage of the Turkish failed coup in the French media, with the aim of analyzing how ‘French’ media covered the July 15, 2016 attempted coup in Turkey. Discourse analysis technique was used while examining the portrayal of Turkey in one of the most famous French newspapers, namely “Le Monde”. The sampled news items in this study include those published between 15 and 30 July, 2016. The significance of this study is perceived in that the image of Turkey in the French media significantly contributes to the comprehension of the stereotypes and portrayal that European countries have about Turkey. Additionally, understanding this portrayal, stereotype and imaginary place of Turkey in the minds of French people helps us develop new perceptions, strategies and policies. This research is expected to shed light on establishing positive relations between Turkey and France and European Union as well.

Keywords: Le Monde, Turkish Failed Coup, Media Coverage, Stereotypes.

BAŞARISIZ DARBE GİRİŞİMİNİN FRANSIZ MEDYASINDAKİ YANSIMASI: LE MONDE ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Fransız medyasında 15 Temmuz darbe girişimine nasıl yer verildiği konusunu ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda Fransızların en ünlü gazetelerinden biri olan *Le Monde* gazetesinde 15-30 Temmuz 2016 tarihleri arasında yayınlanan haber ve makaleler incelenerek nasıl bir darbe ve Türkiye algısı oluşturulmaya gayret edildiği tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Çalışma çerçevesinde üzerine odaklanılan Fransız medyasındaki Türkiye imajı özellikle Avrupa ülkelerinin Türkiye hakkında ne gibi stereotiplerinin ve betimlemelerinin olduğunu ortaya koyması açısından da önem arz etmektedir. Ayrıca Fransız toplumunun zihnindeki bu imajların, kalıpyargıların ve betimlemelerin anlaşılması Türkiye’nin yeni algılar, stratejiler ve politikalar geliştirmesine yardımcı olacaktır. Çalışmanın Türkiye ile Fransa ve Avrupa Birliği ile olumlu ilişkiler kurabilmesi noktasında aydınlatıcı olacağı umulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Le Monde, Başarısız Darbe, Medyanın Haberleşmesi, Stereotip.

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INTRODUCTION

Promoting a positive image in the minds of Europeans who remain less than enthusiastic about accepting Turkey's inclusion into the European Union is of big significance. Because there are deeply rooted perceptions and historical concerns held by European societies regarding Turkey – a country which has been trying to join the EU since 1963.

This article, which is a case study, focuses on the media coverage of the Turkish failed coup in one of the most influential French newspapers, namely “*Le Monde*”. The news items published between 15 and 30 July, 2016 were taken as sample. During this period 13 news articles related with the coup attempt were found in the newspaper and examined by discourse analysis.

This study adopted discourse analysis, because, as defined by Foucault, it refers to: ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning (Weedon, 1987: 108).

Mass media also serves as a tool for manufacturing discourse. Chibnall argues that the language used in the news stories is the language which belongs to the political elite (Matheson, 2005: 24). The words and sentences used in the news reflects the meanings and values of a certain group. According to Van Dijk, journalists install their opinions and ideologies into the news discourse (Van Dijk, 1998: 33). If they have similar values with a group they are likely to put forward positive properties when they put negative properties if they have different values. Such ideologies of groups and group relations are constructed by a group-based selection of relevant social values.

The main hypothesis of this research is that French media covered the military coup in Turkey in a negative way because of the image of Turkish government in their minds. Regarding the hypothesis, these questions will also be given answer during the research;

1. How did the French media cover the military coup?
2. How did the French media portray the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Turkey?
3. What kind of headlines were used?
4. What kind articles were published in order to explain the situation in a detailed manner?

Analysis of the study was done in five phases. In the first phase the history of Turkish-French relations and France's EU prospects were examined. In the second pha-

se we look at the French media coverage of the failed coup in Turkey with emphasis on *Le Monde*'s newspaper coverage. In the subsequent phases, various topics were discussed such as Turkey and human rights, the image of the president, the portrayal of Turkey in *Le Monde* and its implications to the shared history of Turkey and France respectively.

Hopefully this research will make a significant contribution to the understanding of the portrayal of Turkey in the French media. Additionally, this study also clarifies the ideological approach of the *Le Monde* in covering the attempted coup in Turkey.

1. HISTORY of TURKISH-FRENCH RELATIONS and TURKEY'S EU PROSPECT

Despite the fact that good relations between Turkey and France have a long history which dates back to the alliance of François I and Suleyman the Magnificent in 1536, recently bilateral relationship between Ankara and Paris has proven to be a period of a strain. Therefore the year 1536 is marked as the beginning of the Turkish-French relations with the Franco-Ottoman Alliance between François I and Suleyman the Magnificent as the French emperor was in a desperate need for alliance and assistance from the Ottoman Empire. Trade agreements between the two countries were concluded and lasted until their abolition with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Since 1935 France has continuously had its diplomatic representation in Turkey. France and Turkey have been in the state of war three times in the history. The first war fought by these two countries was in the end of the eighteenth century during Napoleon's campaign to Egypt and Syria between 1798 and 1800. The second confrontation took place during the first World War, in particular during the Gallipoli campaigns. The third of these wars was during the Turkish War of Independence and is known as the Cilicia War or the Franco-Turkish War of 1920-21 (Davut Han Aslan, 2014: 123).

Despite these three clashes, the Turkish-French relations throughout the history can be described as relatively peaceful and friendly.

The most burning issue in determining the Turkish-French relationship in last decades was France's strong opposition to the Turkish aspirations to join the European Union. The most important goal of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) which was established on November 3 2002, has been the accession to the European Union. In order to realize this, the AK Party took a series of political and economic reforms in line with the Copenhagen political and economic criteria that the European Union imposed on Turkey. In spite of the intensive reforms implemented by the Turkish government, France continued to refuse Turkey to join the European Union, because of its almost eighty million Muslim population.

In the same context, the former president of France (1974-1981) and head of the European Constitution Preparation Committee “Valéry Giscard d’Estaing” said that the inclusion of Turkey in Europe union means the end of Europe, (Chris Morris, 14.11.2002. Additionally, the former French president Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) is considered as one of the strongest opponents of the idea of accession Turkey to the European Union. Since he took over the presidency, he struggled to change upside down the European policy towards Turkey’s membership to the European Union (Sputnik international, 20.03.2016). He also agreed with Angela Merkel the German Chancellor in the context of refusing Turkey to join the European Union. However, the difference between Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy was that Sarkozy refused the idea of Turkey’s membership in the Europe Union clearly and without reservation. When he visited Turkey in February 2011 he expressed his position by saying that we oppose the issue of Turkey joining to the European Union, and now we are currently trying to understand the red lines of both sides and find a common formula so as not to disturb the stability of the EU, and injure the pride of Turkish people (Martin Kuebler, AFP, Reuters, 26.02.2011).

Meanwhile, from the French political discourse towards Turkey, the relationship between the self and the others and the role of identity in politics can easily be understood. Therefore, France regards all non-Christian Europeans as “the others”, which they can practice on them economic, political and cultural hegemony.

The spread of Islam in France has been a bigger threat to the country, where are over 5 million Muslims and this number is likely to increase, due to high number of Muslim births and immigration.

Additionally, France looks at the Muslim culture as a culture that threatens the security and stability in Europe. This is what was expressed by the Western and French media when it adopts an illogical approach between the mosque and the machine gun, considering European Muslims as a time bomb. In the historical and cultural memory of the French, Turkey is still considered the heir of Ottoman Empire that dropped the historic capital of Christianity, Istanbul today in 1453 to Ankara, the current capital (Muammr Faisal Kholi, 11.02.2015).

In short, ideologies are still doing their work in politics, and it is not true that they ended at the end of the cold war.

2. THE FRENCH MEDIA COVERAGE of THE FAILED MILITARY COUP in TURKEY

In this part, various French media, especially radio, television and newspapers that covered the 2016 failed military coup in Turkey were considered. It can be claimed that French media acted unprofessionally, biased and failed to respect democratic values in transmitting the facts and events of the failed coup attempt in Turkey, by

implicating a limited group within the Turkish army of the parallel terrorist organization. For instance, during the first hours of the failed coup, the French media refrained to mention the name of the organization which was responsible for this attempted coup and said that a group of military leaders in the Turkish army is taking over the reins in Turkey, while the channel “BFM” news claimed that the Turkish people adopted and accepted this process.

Similarly, the French channel correspondent in Turkey Maria Forrester; said that the Turkish people have not responded to the call of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan about the need to go to the streets, and those people who went on the streets in the alleys went out to withdraw their money from automated credit machines or to buy foodstuffs to save them until the situation calms down. In connection with the coup attempt on the night of 15 July, the Turkish writer and journalist, “Nedim Gürsel,” a resident in Paris, expressed concern about the magnifications launched by the people in the face of the failed coup attempt in the live broadcast of the channel, “Eitel” French.

However, *Le Monde* ignored the negative effects of the coup attempt and claimed that the failure of this attempt increased Erdoğan’s strength and said that Erdoğan would use the process of investigations in Turkey within the framework of the law against those involved in the attempt and this would be an opportunity for him to strengthen his authority in the country. Likewise, the French newspaper *Le Monde* also showed its positions on the attempted coup clearly, when it underestimated the blood of martyrs who fell in defense of democracy and freedom, describing the failed attempt as “somewhat bloody.” For its part, *Le Figaro* newspaper reported that Turkey was affected by the coup and the economy is very risky, thus trying to instill doubts in the eyes of its readers towards Turkey.

In the same context, the newspaper wrote that “Turkey was affected with terrorist attacks since the beginning of this year”. In addition, *Le Figaro* reported that Turkey is not a safe country for tourists and this problem seriously threatened the economy. The weekly *L’observatoire* magazine adopted the style of supporters of the parallel entity of the coup attempt and it reported some headlines by asking that if Erdoğan was behind this attempted coup in Turkey. Adding that Erdoğan might have deliberately fabricated this attempt to liquidate. The newspaper did not mention in their news that President Erdoğan’s had escaped from the assassination attempt from Marmaris hotel that was attacked by coupes after 15 minutes from his departure. While commenting on the positions of the French media towards the attempted coup in Turkey, the president of the Union of Turkish Democrats in Europe told to the Anatolian correspondent that the French media do not adhere to neutrality towards Turkey and that these measures deal with double standards on what is happening in Turkey (Daily Sabah, 22.07.2016). Now we discuss the *Le Monde* newspaper coverage of the failed coup as that of using screaming headlines to attract public attention.

3. HEADLINES DISCLOSE INTENTIONS

The most important news and headlines relating to failed coup in Turkey, published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* between 15 and 30 July 2016, covered various events such as sacked generals, closed newspapers and television channels, economic recovery. Some attractive headlines are as below; “The Turkish banking sector under threat of rising risks after the coup attempt”, Turkey: Arrest warrant issued against 42 journalists. In Istanbul, the left took over Taksim Square to denounce «diktat and dictatorship», The purge hardens in Turkey, arrest warrants against 300 members of the presidential guard, German footballer Mario Gomez leaves Turkey, Turkey: “It is not only a purge, but a reformatting of the State”, Turkey will derogate from the European Convention on Human Rights, Erdoğan installs his «democrature” in Turkey, Purges in Turkey: Who are the tens of thousands of people targeted?, Magistrates, academics, policemen, journalists: endless purge in Turkey. “One day, Turkey will emerge from this authoritarian system”, Turkey: President Erdoğan purges education, No visa waiver for Turks, predicts European Commissioner, Turkey: the purge continues, Erdoğan has his hands free to establish an authoritarian regime, Turkey: Erdoğan evokes a possible re-establishment of the death penalty after the failure of the coup d’etat, Turkey: Nearly 6,000 arrests after attempted coup, The coup d’etat, bad news for Syrian refugees from Turkey, among others.

As is evident from a glance at the topics alone, in this study we noted that news items likely to create a negative and bad image of Turkey were prevalently covered by the French media during that time.

4. TURKEY VIOLATE HUMAN RIGHTS and DISOBEY THE EU PRINCIPLES

The France newspaper *Le Monde* published more than 9 articles between 15 and 30 July 2016, accusing Turkey of violating human rights. Saying that it had launched a purge campaign after the military failed coup against journalists, academicians and army generals who supported Fetullah Gulen (*Le Monde.fr* avec AFP et Reuters, 27.07.2016). In addition it also expressed sympathy with Gulen and his groups by publishing an article in this regard entitled “The European Union and France should welcome the oppressed academicians” those who have been expelled from their positions (Jean-François Bayart 22.07.2016). In the article entitled “Turkey violates the European Convention on Human Rights”, Turkey was described as a country where there is no freedom of opinion and expression (*Le Monde* 21.07.2016). Furthermore, the newspaper also focused on the loss of audiovisual media for their license as well as the cancellation of the press cards for more than 34 journalists. In addition it reported about the placement of more than 2,745 judges in custody and the dismissal of many academicians from their positions (Marie

Jégo, 21.07.2016). In the same way the newspaper published an article reported under the title of one day Turkey will emerge from this authoritarian regime, and there will be more freedom for journalists and human rights advocates (Anne-Clémence Drouant, 21.07.2017). The newspaper also published a statement by an Italian politician and the current High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini calling Turkey to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. THE IMAGE of PRESIDENT RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN

Since 2003 when President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took over government, he has been described as suppressor of the press freedom, good in repression and domination of the media. Quoting from Cengiz Aktar, *Le Monde* emphasized that the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by arresting more than 60,000 men from various sectors of the military, education and judiciary he will return Turkey to what he dreamed of (Cengiz Aktar, 18.07.2016). Additionally, in an article regarding the life of Erdogan, the newspaper focused only on his campaign of arrests ignoring his achievements in government since he came to power in order to distort his image among its readers (*Le Monde* 25.07.2016).

The newspaper also used the term dictator or dictatorial rule in many of its articles and titles (Marie Jégo, 21.06.2016). In addition, it showed that the Turkish people are dissatisfied with their president and that they regard him as a dictator (Marc Semo, 24.07.2016). The newspaper further shows that people always demonstrate against him often to end with his campaign of arrests, killings or torture. In the same time the newspaper published an article entitled “Rightists Demonstrating in Taksim Square in the center of Istanbul”, condemning dictator and dictatorship. It also published an article under the title “Erdoğan proves his democracy in Turkey” (*Le Monde* 21.07.2016) and that he has declared a state of emergency for 3 months. This case can pass new laws in the state and restrict the freedoms of the citizens (*Le Monde.fr* avec AFP, 20.07.2016). The paper also mentioned the Justice and Development Party project of eliminating of all what Kemalists did and the establishment of an Islamic Turkish state. The newspaper also published another article attacking the Turkish president under the title “The putschists offered Erdoğan the presidential regime of which he dreams” (Cengiz Aktar, 18.07.2016). In another article it was claimed that “Erdoğan has his hands free to establish an authoritarian regime» (Nedim Gürsel, 18.07.2016). Conclusively, according to the newspaper, the Turkish president used the coup attempt as an excuse to violate democracy, establish an authoritarian regime (Marine Forestier, 18.07.2016), and the coup opened the way for Erdoğan to implement his policy in Turkey (Ahmet Insel, 18.07.2016).

6. THE PORTRAYAL of TURKEY

After the failed coup in Turkey, the *Le Monde* newspaper portrayed Turkey in many articles published in the second half of July 2016 as a country lacking economic and social security and stability. The most attractive article was perhaps the one published in attempt to distort the Turkish president's image describing him as a dictator and Turkey as a country that lacks democracy and freedom of speech as previously mentioned. Many articles published by the same newspaper confirmed the insecurity of Turkey especially the one that mentioned the footballer Mario Gomez's departure from Turkey (Cécile Boutelet, 22.07.2016). Attached to his declaration in which he says that he was living in tension and anxiety in this country that he referred to as the insecure country. The intention of the newspaper was to distort the image of Turkish to the world as an insecure country.

Economically, *Le Monde* also published an article entitled: "The Turkish banking sector threatened increasingly after the military coup". The article included the prediction of huge economic crises for Turkey after this coup -notably concerning external investments-, an internal economic deterioration, low profitability and also a decrease in the number of tourists which will effect the economy of the country in a negative way. (Jade Grandin de l'Eprevier, 26.07.2017).

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, *Le Monde* newspaper had a biased approach against Turkey and subjectivity concerning democratic values respect, during its reportage of the failed military coup attempt by a minority group in the Turkish military. From the beginning of the crisis, the newspaper administration never hesitated to go into the Turkish matter; yet, all its headlines were devoted to it, the fact that takes the reader back to the Ottoman and European conflict. The newspaper condemned Turkey and its president, distorted the Turkish image to the world and there was misdirection of the general opinion by supporting the coup, which was clear and understood from its published headlines. In fact, *Le Monde's* opinion about the coup became obvious to the public when it underestimated the martyrs' sacrifice for democracy and freedom, and described the attempt to be a bit bloody. The newspaper's administration also neglected the negative aspects of the coup and claimed that its failure achieved nothing but empowering Erdoğan, and expected that he will benefit from the investigations in Turkey and hence empower his authority in the country.

In Conclusion, while commenting on the positions of the *Le Monde* regarding the military coup in Turkey, it can be claimed that it did not adhere to neutrality and objectivity towards Turkey and that these measures deal with double standards on what is happening in Turkey.

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