



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Transition from Soviet-Communist Media Theory to New Authoritarian Media System: Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan Media Case

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### Abstract

Seventy years of the sovereignty under the Russia, the collapse of the Soviet power has caused the emergence of new states. In the early of the 1990s the Central Asian Republic of Turkmenistan and the Caucasus Republic of Azerbaijan freed from the oppression of communism and in a successive declare their political independence. There are important developments regarding the Turkish world. In these countries the media was covered by Soviet-Communist Theory was used as propaganda and persuasion tool of the political regime in USSR period. After gaining the independence both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have passed form the Soviet media system to the New Authoritarian media system. But according to the media that completly operate under the authoritarian regime in Turkmenistan, the media in Azerbaijan has managed to be freer editorial context. The process undergone by the media of Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan from Communist Theory to the New Authoritarian Theory will be examined in this study in detail.

**Keywords:** *Media, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Soviet-Communist Theory, New Authoritarian Theory*

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## Introduction

It is well known that communication instruments have been conflicts and clashes with political power since the process in which first appeared. Thus political power has sought to control the communication with strict regulations throughout history. In this context, the main reason of the variations in social and communication tools, expected to play a role in the political process, is differences in the political system (Işık, 2002: 2). Political system in the country has shaped the communication system as the main determinant of the relationship (Weischenberg, 1992: 86). With regard to the political system, general arrangement of the economic life affects the communication system (Işık, 2002: 11). After 1917 revolution, a process had begun where there are fundamental changes in every sector of society with the establishment of the Soviet Union. Soviet Media and other mass media formed the normative framework of a new media theory in this process by organizing based on the Marxist doctrine and in accordance with the fundamental principles developed by Lenin (Kaya, 1985: 55). According to Schramm, who looked on that Media Theory of the Soviet Totalitarian serves as an extension of the Authoritarian Theory, although Marx never actually mentioned the mass communication problems, Marxist idea formed the basis of the Soviet press system. There is a sharp contrast and distinction between Marxist integrity concept and right and wrong issues. This situation does not allow that the press criticizes the government freely, acts as a forum for discussion and tasks to fulfill its function as the fourth power. Consequently, the media, helping to interpret the realization of the Communist Party Marxist thought politics is a tool that serves the interests of the working class (Işık, 2002: 35). The Soviet-Communist Theory of the press has formed as “model for other socialist countries in the field of communication arrangements” in time.

The mass media, as a tool of the government or party, has performed its responsibilities under the strict control of the state. In the Soviet Union, everything is for the realization of a single purpose and it is not be accepted the deviations from the purposes and the contrary to this objective. The lack of deviation from the idea of purpose leads to substantially similarities of any kind of information, given the same day by all Soviet mass media. When there is no different political ideas and structures, it is natural to not be located in different political interests or media debate. Therefore, media-like appearance is regarded as a “great power”. The scope of the theory, it is clear that mass media has an important function for “social integration and unity”. There are intensive control mechanisms to prevent the country from any kind of external sources for interruption of this function operates. Censorship is considered necessary and legitimate (Budak, 1997).

## **Soviet-Communist Media Theory in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan in the period of USSR**

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, which have continued their exists as Soviet republics in the Soviet Union border for many years, left behind the first twenty years of the independence process as significant reform years. The structure is directed to a different embodiment after independence, which serving for the purposes of the Communist Party organ as a media organ effectively during the Communist system and

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does not interfere with the government's policy of mass media in contrary develops them by supporting their objectives and reinforces the dominance of the ruling power (Vural, 1994: 29). This different configuration means that forming a mass communication system ideally based on the press and freedom of expression and directed to democratic criteria in the media field of all republics in transition period. However, it is observed that the traces of the old system are still there throughout the process.

Initiation of Bolshevism in the Caucasus and in the Central Asia through the era of postcommunist authoritarianism, a continuum of constraints has restricted the media. Lenin's candid acknowledgment that press freedom and public access to information could threaten his young regime was followed by Josef Stalin's acknowledgment of the power of a controlled press to sustain the Communist Party and its government (Freedman, 2011: 1). Social and political life, directed through the media. Public was informed about the issues by the government which they want announce and thus the thoughts and opinions of the individuals kept under control. Mass-communication in Soviet-Communist Theory was developed along the line of Lenin and Stalin. Media assumes functions for the purposes of the regime as a major manufacturer and distributor of ideology and culture. The media kept under central control which based on methods as "Propaganda and Persuasion". The method in this propaganda was distributed as planned and continuous news, knowledge to influence thinking and behavior of certain target groups (Labin, 1976: 10-11). Controlling or orientation the operation of this field by political actors can be seen in almost all of mass communication systems in the influence of communist theory. This controls and inspections are performed under different conditions than the old method, of course. However, it does not mean that controls and inspections do not exist anymore. Sometimes inspections are made in the effects of the financial powers, and sometimes both political and commercial actors are trying to make impression on them.

The control of the mass-media in the Soviet-Communist Theory was actively used in public transit for achieving the goals of the regime, the daily events in the making from the perspective of the ideology of the people of foreign origin and the information required in the regime of protection from foreign posts. As all applications of Soviet period the media control in mass-communication in Soviet Union based on Marxist doctrine and organized the principles which was developed by Lenin has pioneered the formation of a new mass communication theory in intellectual means and this system became a model in other socialist countries within time. In fact, Soviet broadcasting and all the media tools in general are used in the process of creation of one voice "Soviet people" (Dadashov, 1992: 14).

The change process observed in the mass communication system of the young republic began in 1985 year Gorbachov came to power, but the concept of freedom of expression and the press at the beginning of the period, as Gorbachev said, were subjected to censorship in terms of the defense of economic and cultural reforms (Budak, 2005: 110). After independence issues prohibited by the Soviet ideology is started come forefront on the agenda, the people suffering from information hunger are started to see the reality and the media only played the role of propaganda for many years is gradually began to be convert into real information tool (Muharramov, 1996: 119). On the other hand in the Soviet system took place even though the claim of equality of nations which constituting the union, especially the non-Slavic was considered the "potential threat" and radio and television broadcasts made in the Turkish Republics also had been noted to the editorial policy (Bal, 1996: 100).

### **General state of the media, in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan in the post-independence period**

There was a significant geopolitical gap in this region after disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991. This gap, which cannot be filled exactly by any power alone, is witnessed to making large strategies and the efforts of regional and global powers for emplacement with different moves. In addition, South Caucasus and Central Asia are regions with natural wealth and have importance in strategic terms (Memmedli, 2012: 2). Achieving their independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Central Asian Turkmenistan and Caucasian Azerbaijan began to pursue the democratization efforts in their own terms. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was caught unprepared for these states about independence and all republics have faced major problems in the democratization (Budak, 2013: 2). The media is also seen the dominant power tend to use as political tool in the post-independence. Especially in the first years of independence more clearly seen that the Soviet method (Downing, 1990: 151) to be used in the field of mass communication by all the forces who want to be effective in political life after independence (Androunas, 1991: 186-187).

On the path to democracy both of republic has led to to various problems in the settlement of properly media system for every country in transition period. Current discussions are underway about pressures of political power on the task of working in the field of media, affecting of international and ethnic tensions to the follow-up news, the importance of the role of the media which contribute to civil and democratic society and the importance of structuring an efficient mass communication. Publications which were operated in Soviet-Communist Media System for seventy years have gone to another dimension after independence. Substantially the freedom of the media is also affected by this process. The development of the press and freedom of expression in these republics significantly depend on economic and political development of country (Budak, 2013: 2).

Throughout the seventy years of Soviet system Turkmenistan, did not have truly free and democratic media system. Also continues the management and control of a single party after independence. Media system in the country very few like it in the world continues its communication acts as a system of central-controlled and private enterprise can not enter the field of media. The government of Turkmenistan has been checked media very extensively for the duration of twenty-four years independence.

The situation is slightly different in Azerbaijan. Even allowing for the operating of private broadcasting in the country, government control is not missing out in these media organs. There is a strong competition between the state-controlled media and private media organizations in Azerbaijan. An increasing the number of commercial channels and media organizations are also available which advocate the views of the opposition. The Russian language is also widely used in the press of Azerbaijan. The most followed media is television. Freedom of expression is protected by the Constitution and laws in Azerbaijan and required infrastructure are provided the freedom of expression and press in theoretical meaning. However, in application area the problems with the freedom of press and expression maintain its presence. State control and effect over the audiovisual media is greater than the press. Frequency supply and giving broadcasting license caused chaos in process and many radio and television organizations has experienced the problems especially during the first decade of independence. Press employees, vocational training activities are limited and various professional journalism organizations which operating in Azerbaijan are effective when they can overcome their economic difficulties.

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The changes seen in all aspects of social life in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan republics are also observed in television broadcasting. National consciousness was becoming stronger in the entire formations constitute the Soviet Union with weakening of censorship on television broadcasting by reconstruction and glasnosts since mid-1980s. In many republics constitute the Union, pro-independence movement began, propaganda against Russian colonialism was seen in the media widely (Demir, 2000: 15).

On the other hand, it is understood from some applications that traces of “Soviet-Communist Theory” (Sibert, 1963: 5) in the intellectual platform are not fully eliminated after independence, which is one of the four basic theories of media (Authoritarian, Liberal, Social Responsibility, Soviet and Communist theories) and dominating in the pre-independence mass communication system and including philosophical foundations of the mass communication system. For example, state televisions continue their operations in both republics, as in the period of the USSR. AZTV state channel in Azerbaijan supports the state’s political and economic policy, is shaped its broadcasting in comply with it (Rüstamov, 2005: 52). In Turkmenistan, due to there is no private broadcasting organizations, four state televisions still continue to broadcast. These are channels of “TMT-1”, “TMT-2”, “TMT-3” (All Turkmen) and also “TV-4” started broadcasting in 2004, which focus on entertainment programs ([www.turkmenistan.russian-club.net/smi.html](http://www.turkmenistan.russian-club.net/smi.html)). Aliyev’s (Azerbaijan) and Niyazov’s, Berdymukhamedov’s (Turkmenistan) periods, there has been a steady decline in the coverage of the opposition. Both Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have also returned to the Soviet era totalitarian or post-totalitarian media system. There are most obvious differences in terms of the media autonomy, content control, pluralism, ideology and language. Big differences are in terms of content control, autonomy and pluralism. On the other hand, the political regime of Berdumammedov and Aliyev has a negative impact on the media are monitored and condemned by international human rights organizations. The power of Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan also violates the international agreements by restricting the freedom of expression.

In one hand “media lords” set up complex relationships with the political power defined as “interest”, but on the other hand observed that media companies were converted an important component of the capital group in both republic. After the dictatorship, media has showed the condensation and commercialization features in emerging republics as a post-communist countries. Political independence did not bring the commercialization of the mass communication and the media ownership has become highly politicized instrumentalized by political ambition (Bek, 2010: 105).

Independent states revealed with the disintegration of the Soviet Union while living the whole problems of being integrated process into the international system, on the other hand come to the fore eliminating the need for the neglected societal and cultural needs. Therefore to be a part of Soviet Culture in the ruling political elite has been shaped different perception of dominance, in addition the efforts of people to adapt to the new economic and political system have deeply affected the citizens of Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan (Bichakci, 2008: 2).

## **Manifestation of New Authoritarian Media System in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan**

Central Asian Turkish Republic of Turkmenistan and South Caucasus Turkish Republic of Azerbaijan had been organized mass communication systems according to the principles that dominate in Soviet Union in the pre-independence period. During the Soviet era the most comprehensive description of media system in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan was Soviet-Communist Theory put forward by Siebert and colleagues. But at different times in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are known to be functionally different theories. Even though the media of these countries are shaped by the Communist theory in USSR, after regaining their freedom have tried to adapt to liberal theory, yet often remain under the influence of authoritarian theory. But despite of any trouble, deficiencies and disadvantages, after the 1990s, the study of the application of neoliberal policies in the political and economic fields, the front control and censorship on the print media and audiovisual communications field did not implemented completely and it is indicator of whether an authoritarian approach.

Thus, after 1990 media systems applied in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan mixed of Liberal, Authoritarian and Social Responsibility theories in accordance with the country conditions or may be considered a derivative comprising of a mixture thereof. Researcher Jonathan Becker began to use the concept of “Neo-Authoritarian Media System” about this derived. Jonathan Becker says that the new authoritarian media system arises from the combination of authoritarian theory and Soviet communist theory (Becker, 2004: 139–163). After achieving independence in both of Republics, New Authoritarian theory is considered as an evaluation to correct to some extent in the free spaces is not fully meet the current state of the old media theory, who are formerly lived under the umbrella of the Soviet Union. New theory contains traces of authoritarian and soviet-communist theory is intended to describe relationship between mass communication system and political system (especially in Russia and in some of the new republics).

Despite media organizations operating in the new authoritarian system has been offered constitutionally enshrined democratic and free media environment, the laws remain only on paper. Most of journalists who are pressured and subjected to violence bowed their necks to the government requests or tend to leave the country. The scope of the system that the new authoritarian State-owned media has, has a limited autonomy and key positions assignments depend on political loyalty. It may be open to the public, access to the media, and are the exclusive property of tolerable but other mechanisms are used to control messages. State aid, targeted (special purpose) tax benefits, the Government advertising and other forms of assistance, support is used to increase. To silence critics, defamatory determining fines for journalists, public interest, national security and related issues such as the image of the president largely side of the received laws items as legal and applied selectively against media owners through the so-called legal actions of the economic dominant prerelease is quite dense state censorship is not the solution (Becker, 2002: 168-170).

New-media that authoritarian system also may be or your own political interests of flexible leadership authority and a weak judiciary might have difficulty enforcing the execution system. Worst of all, regime, defiant journalists and editors ignore violence against and not his voice. One of the targets is to create uncertainty among the journalists, in this way, self-censorship, the most common and important journalistic activities restrictive. New-from systems that more traditional authoritarian system that

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authoritarianism is a little different situation within the scope of the spread of democracy, and the strategic power of television's communicative usage instances are. Some of the elements of political democratic mass media system are being tolerated, given the image of democratization; there are limits to the underlying media autonomy. New-non-authoritarian system specifically distinguishes between broadcast and media environment, which is branching. In the system, that the new authoritarian State, is capable of controlling the publication tools suggests, especially television because television is perceived as the most important tool to communicate with the population. Especially important as economic troubles in Russia and the people's purchasing power is significantly limited in countries where television is often the most important communication tool, the Government on major issues on television, published on the negative and positive control implementation capacity, meaningful pluralism and citizens "a conscious political decisions and vote based on the selection you can use the" capacity of the axes (Gunther and Mughan, 2000: 421).

The new media that authoritarian system has a unique feature, when you have a tight lid on television, periodic harassment, violence, and despite the relatively autonomous closing, you can access and the population is extremely critical for the regime in an independent owner (individuals, parties or foreign companies) is the presence of a remarkable printed press.

Both in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan when journalists were exposed the government's anger they come face to face with the risk of detention, deportation, and even assassination. Despite the independent media organizations operate legally and are also part of the new authoritarian theory is not a potent force. Journalists are often threatened, attacked and constantly intervened by power, emerging as key opposition figures in the country. Having new authoritarian media system, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan government's senior executives are different from their counterparts in active authoritarian regimes are trying to suppress the independent media by using more subtle mechanisms of censorship and pressure.

These methods:

### *1. Giving a bribe to media organizations*

Giving a bribe to media organizations is the common method in the Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan Republic for silencing of the media. In the preparation of the only positive news about the power, the presentation of praise news about the senior managers in the state and their families to fill the pockets of media bosses with bribes are the way in which government frequently resort. The power uses the media not only preparation of the good news about themselves aslo for preparation of bad and false news about the opposition politicians. The government also gives the bribe to the televisions and the newspapers to prevent the litting of events which was held by the opposition. We can identify these media organizations as a "Ordering Media" and reporters of these media demanding bribes from government officials with the shamelessly, also decorate the main news bulletins and news headlines with lie informations.

As a result all of these, public anymore lost their trust to the media and people follow the news about their country through the foreign media.

### *2. Organs such as Media Supreme Council of State be selective to the distribution of the ads*

Private media organizations which are closest to the power benefit from the largest slice of the advertising pie. At the same time advertising time violations made in the pro-government media are also ignored.

*3. To do the manipulation of tax to the borrower media organizations*

Many government and private media organizations in the Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan charged with amount of tax liability. State authorities seized the opportunity of these tax debt are able to direct opponents media outlets in accordance with their requests. Government hold the media under the more of pressure which has debt to the state and unlawfully swell tax liability each year. On the other hand, tax liability of the media who are close to power reset and their tax kidnapping are tolerated by the government.

*4. To provoke conflicts between shareholders of broadcasting organizations*

Government is waiting impatiently quarrel between the partners of the major broadcasters. The power uses clashes to reduce weaker media organizations and try attracting them in every way. As a result of this instigation causes the proliferation of new pro-government media.

*5. The implementation of the restrictive media laws that facilitate the prosecution of independent and opposition journalists*

Both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan one of the biggest problems in the field of media in legal regulations. The start of the privatization process in broadcasting and journalism as well as in all fields following 1990s in the independence period after of Soviet Union is due to the necessity of new requirements in the new era and it indicates that a new page was turned in this area now. Complex broadcast environment consist of private televisions was required to proceed with legal regulations, which starting their broadcasting individually in the legal gap environment at first (Ercilasun, 1997).

These countries want a Constitution or press-release law of the existing freedom of expression in words and in a clear manner are emphasized. But law said “the promise and the freedom of expression” is very difficult to come across the notion of experience. With the many changes made in legislation the media system more democratic and free press is also moved to the criteria of cases for employees and conviction have been observed to increase in recent years of more. In these countries, Information, justice and communications Ministries also indicated an overall effect on the media system. Sometimes the press circles by this domain, the opposition criticized as print press mute has been described as. Also present in the country, some members of the mass media laws limiting the activities of free media. For example, edits pointed out in Turkmenistan include press agencies as in the instructions must be given notice in the on-premises statements included. For example, an accident will occur in the armed forces, border with neighbors to live any problems occurring in the country, such as a natural disaster, accident, citizen’s confidence that the Government will ensure that issues are asked to shake. If this does not comply with the rules imposed heavy sanctions on journalists (Budak, 2003: 137).

In these countries legal guarantees on media freedom cannot be fully achieved or cannot be put into practice. Unresolved issues in the media field affect social and regional problems negatively. Mass media in post-Soviet countries of South Caucasus constitutes an important example in terms of strengthening more mentioned tension by the media and converting extreme nationalism into confrontational contradictions and tensions (Budak, 2007: 131-147).

### Conclusion

The answer to the question “what kind of a mass communication order?” in the case of the Republic of Turkmenistan in the Central Asia and in the Republic of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus is that it should not be a system which involves, on one hand, a state dependent media understanding that supports pro-government discourses and, on the other hand, a media understanding which has come under the domination of trade monopolies, having completely financial concerns, always encountering problems in the role that it plays and in the path that it takes for the purpose of being critical, and always striving against various pressures. It is seen, however, that the conflict between, on one side, the mass communication understanding of the Soviet era, which is a hangover of the past and could not be eliminated completely and, on the other side, the new values as a necessity of independence and the new liberal media system in these two republics. Those powers which strive to dominate media try to shape the public opinion based on their own interests.

It is seen in theoretical evaluations that the philosophical foundations of mass communication often do not meet the conditions brought by liberal-pluralist social responsibility or democratic participation theories, that they generally develop in accordance with the New Authoritarian Theory, which is more a new assessment of the Soviet-Communist Theory and the Authoritarian Theory, and that, although there are differences from country to country, new methods which can be classified as licensing (there are blockages against private enterprises especially in radio and television, transactions take too long, sometimes frequency and license allocations cannot be carried out for years due to the deterrent and dissuasive forces), prosecution (a control method involving such sanctions as punishment, prison sentence or disablement from profession against those who make publications or broadcasting that allegedly involves slender or personal right violations) or special taxes (a control method which is imposed on both circulations and also on profit shares and thus brings an additional cost) or which are current adaptations of the past are implemented. In the New Authoritarian Theory, the state influence continues by more covert control or internal methods or those methods which involve self-control. The effect of intense commercialization often empowers the close cooperation or connection of those persons or groups who dominate media organizations with the political powers for maintaining their existence and also empowers the structure in which media assumes a more conciliating, rather than critical, role.

As a result of all these, the New Authoritarian Theory is known as the most appropriate theory for understanding the media system in the case of both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. The New Authoritarian Theory is considered to be an assessment for filling, to some extent, the gap that occurs due to the fact that the former media theories cannot sufficiently meet the current situation in these countries.

Although, in the case of the Republic of Azerbaijan, some steps have been taken for a free press, this process seems to have not yet started in Turkmenistan. Of course, there are differences between countries. That is to say, it is clear that a single theoretical perspective or assessment will not be sufficient. The fact that, in new republics, media organizations do not possess a long background after the independence period involves many processes or steps which can be considered both positive and negative. Although direct state control and the relevant propaganda activities are officially abandoned in this period, free press could not yet been established completely.

It is considered that the future of independent media is under threat in these republics where the freedom of speech and press is limited.

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### Article Info

*Received:* April 30 2015

*Accepted:* August 20 2015

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