

BROADCASTING

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Türkish public diplomacy, both state and non-state, features a variety of programs, including but not limited to exchanges, publications, cultural programming, and international broadcasting. This report focuses on Türkiye's broadcasting efforts and the larger implications of broadcasting as it relates to Türkiye's nation brand. During the first week of the YEI-USC MPD-sponsored trip to Türkiye, we had the pleasure of visiting public broadcast stations, including Anadolu Agency and TRT World, as well as the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK). Founded in 1920, Anadolu Agency is a state-run news agency headquartered in Ankara. Founded in 2015, TRT World is an English language public broadcaster headquartered in Istanbul with broadcasting centers in Washington D.C. and London. Founded in 1994, RTÜK is an Ankara-based public agency that monitors, regulates, and sanctions radio and television broadcasts.

Anadolu Agency had its start before Türkiye became a republic. This embedded history has made it not only Türkiye's oldest but also largest news agency, spanning 76 countries. During the visit, Agency representatives emphasized drone journalism and underwater journalism, as well as a news academy to train journalists. They also noted that more than half of the stakeholders are private, making 49% of stakeholders public and free to 'do work against the government. This idea of being able to be openly critical of the current government during broadcasts is not common. According to the 2022 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index, Türkiye ranked 149 out of 180 countries in press freedom. RSF claims the nation is seeing an increase in authoritarianism which challenges media pluralism, with 90% of national media under government control and with 31 journalists and one media worker being held in prison.

One of the overarching ideas from the visit at the TRT World broadcast center is their emphasis on professional, not neutral coverage of current events. For example, staff members noted

their coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not neutral, but “professional.” They said they provide equal and “fair” coverage of both sides because they believe “people should be at the heart of the story.” Staff also mentioned their partnership with other news agencies like AFP, AP, Reuters, and of great importance, Anadolu Agency. Additionally, they noted that while they are a public broadcaster, they are not state-owned and hence should not be considered propaganda. This brings into question the idea of reputation and how it relates to nation branding, as well as how international broadcasting can play a critical role in nation branding. If broadcasters like Al Jazeera, BBC, CNN, and Reuters, report negatively on Türkiye, this can have a negative impact on its nation brand. If Turkish international broadcasters only report positively on the nation, this can lead to ideas of propaganda and state-controlled media. While promoting positive images of the nation abroad is a key element of nation branding, there is a fine line between promotion and propaganda, with the latter being a tool used by governments to control the narrative.

While RTÜK is not a broadcaster like the other two, they are the media regulatory body of the nation, focused on licensing. This media governing body has been criticized by RSF, most recently for fining three national TV broadcasters for their reporting on the February 6th earthquake that mentioned critiques of the government’s handling, or mishandling, of the crisis. In 2022, RTÜK notified Amerikanin Sesi (Voice of America) of a license violation for its online media platform. They noted that if VoA failed to obtain the appropriate licenses, RTÜK would block access to or remove the content and impose criminal sanctions. (Note: following our visit, the Turkish government refused to extend the operating license of German broadcaster Deutsche Welle). Actions like these are being construed by outside organizations and AKP opposition party members as evidence of growing government control over journalism critical of the government. Does limiting voices, opinion, and ideas lead to reputational issues? Similarly, can this affect the government’s rebranding campaign? Reputation is one of the key factors in nation branding. Having regulated/controlled media outlets is not conducive to building a better nation brand and eliminating prejudices. Türkiye in particular sits at a crucial geographical location, at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. It has the potential to be an

indispensable player in both continents. However, limiting media outlets via sanctions can have negative consequences on its reputation and can potentially hinder its rebranding movement.

In conclusion, these visits brought into question the idea of Turkish broadcasting as an extension of the government's foreign policy goals. Broadcasting, as a subsection of public diplomacy, is intended to help a nation reach its foreign policy goals. In the case of Türkiye, the government is actively funding broadcasting that focuses on highlighting the nation's achievements and portraying it in a positive light to international audiences. While the rebranding movement of Turkey to Türkiye and positive news stories can help shape international audiences, issues that affect the nation, like press freedom, are urgent and need to be addressed by the government. If a government cannot be critical of itself and apologize for past actions, then it can fall into a self-set trap of being labeled as authoritarian and spewing propaganda, and can hinder any positive rebranding efforts in the international sphere.

Sources

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