

The Historical Development and Current State of Turkish-Language Print Media in North Macedonia

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ABSTRACT

This research explores Turkish printed media's history, historical development, and current state in North Macedonia. In this context, the evolution of Turkish printed media in North Macedonia from the past to the present is examined, and a detailed analysis of the current situation is presented. The study aims to investigate the history, general condition, and impact of newspapers and magazines published in Turkish in Macedonia. Given the limited research conducted on Turkish media in North Macedonia in general, this study is carried out by taking into account the significance and urgency of the topic. Furthermore, the research aims to reveal the social, political, literary, and international dimensions of Turkish-language printed media, to understand the transformations in this field, and to provide a comprehensive evaluation. This study will also contribute to future research on Turkish media in Macedonia, serve as a guide, and raise awareness about the importance of Turkish media. The study is structured into two main periods: before and after the independence of North Macedonia. This division is significant because prior to independence- during the Yugoslav era- Turkish media supported the preservation of ethnic identities and cultures and provided detailed information about the challenges faced by the Turkish community. The number of Turkish newspapers and magazines in Macedonia has varied across different periods. The significant decline in Turkish language publications before and after the Yugoslav era occurred under the direct influence of political and social changes in the region. In recent years, with the spread of digital media, it has been concluded that Turkish-language publications have begun to increase in digital platforms.

Keywords: North Macedonia, Turkish, Media, Turkish Printed Media.

INTRODUCTION

The geographical location of North Macedonia has been known as a region inhabited by Turks before, during, and after the Ottoman period. Following the Ottoman Empire's settlement in this region, it became historically notable as a center that produced significant authors who left a profound impact on Turkish literature. With the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the region, many Turks returned to Anatolia, and subsequent waves of migration led to a steady decline in the Turkish population in the area. It is a historical fact that major developments following the retreat of the Ottoman Empire negatively affected the Turkish population; however, these circumstances did not lead to the complete disappearance of the Turkish presence, nor did they eradicate the influence of the Turkish language in the region.

The period of silence that began in 1912 began to ease somewhat after the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia following the end of World War II. Nevertheless, negative developments during the early years of the Yugoslav federation prompted another wave of migration, with many Turks once again relocating to the Republic of Turkey. Despite a significant demographic loss during this period, the presence of the Turkish community persisted, and the influence of the Turkish language expanded. Turkish-language education was introduced, Turkish theater was established, and Turkish-language media continued to operate within the state structure.

The publication of the newspaper *Birlik* by the Yücel Organization marked a significant milestone. Later, the newspaper was incorporated into the state system and continued publication under the *Nova Makedonija* printing house. In its early years, the newspaper was considered a publication for Muslims, but it later became the official organ of the Macedonian People's Front. In fact, this was recognized as a right granted to the Turks of Yugoslavia, allowing Turkish-language media to exist within state-supported platforms such as newspapers, television, and radio.

From the end of World War II until the independence of North Macedonia, Turkish-language newspapers and magazines were published periodically—weekly, three times a week, monthly, or quarterly. During various periods,

different civil society organizations also published their own media outlets. The most significant problem in Turkish-language print media has been the lack of continuity. Among these publications, *Birlik* stands out as the longest-running newspaper compared to others.

The Contribution and Influence of Turkish-Language Print Media on Balkan Turkish Literature

Print media in Macedonia and the broader Balkan region has made a significant contribution to the development of Balkan Turkish literature. This process began with the publication of the *Birlik* newspaper, established in Macedonia in 1944, and continued with the dissemination of Turkish-language radio programs, newspapers, magazines, and book publications. A new literary circle was formed in the region, laying the foundation for the emergence of Balkan Turkish literature, which left a lasting impact throughout the Yugoslav territory. However, Turks living in the autonomous region of Kosovo were only able to access such opportunities starting in 1969, with the publication of newspapers and magazines in the region (İsen, 2009).

The establishment of Turkish-language schools in both urban and rural areas of Macedonia, the publication of Turkish-language textbooks, and the opening of Turkish-language departments in faculties and higher education institutions created a fertile ground for the growth and development of Turkish cultural life within the borders of Macedonia. In this context, Balkan Turkish literature began and flourished under the umbrella of the *Birlik* newspaper. With its publication, poems, tales, and short stories began to appear in the press, contributing to the literary development of poets and writers.

In Macedonia and other parts of the Balkans, the works of poets and writers were published in newspapers and magazines. The children's magazines *Sevinç* and *Tomurcuk*, published under the *Nova Makedonija* publishing house, made substantial contributions to children's literature. The same publisher also released the *Sesler* magazine, which provided broader coverage of literary works. These magazines, particularly *Sevinç*, *Tomurcuk*, and *Sesler*, played a crucial role in nurturing a new generation of poets and writers.

In subsequent years, magazines such as *Üçüncü* and *Köprü* further enriched Macedonian and Balkan Turkish literature by introducing new literary voices. Overall, these developments significantly increased contributions to Turkish literature as a whole.

The Relationship Between Turkish-Language Print Media and Politics

Turkish-language print media in North Macedonia has undergone significant changes and transformations throughout history. From the Ottoman era through the influence of Yugoslavia and into the post-independence period, media institutions and publications have experienced various developmental phases. During this process, the political affiliations of the media, its role in social transformation, technological evolution, its relationship with minority communities, the European Union integration process, and international relations have all been key areas of focus.

The functioning and freedoms of print media in North Macedonia are governed by legal regulations. Fundamental principles such as press freedom and freedom of expression are constitutionally protected and supported by other legal frameworks. However, in certain instances, political pressures and legal restrictions have also been observed. The relationship between print media and politics in North Macedonia has frequently been a subject of public debate. The affiliations between media organizations and political groups, editorial manipulation of news content, and censorship are prominent issues in the media landscape. To ensure the independence of print media institutions from political influences, a legal framework has been established.

Political orientations within Macedonian print media institutions are clearly reflected in the editorial preferences, news selection, and visual presentation of newspapers and magazines. Print media outlets with differing political perspectives often express their affiliations through their relationships with political parties and through the manner in which they represent the political figures they support within their news coverage.

The Publications of Civil Society Organizations Operating in Macedonia

With Macedonia's declaration of independence in 1991, the Turkish community in the country initiated a process of organizational development. The Turkish Democratic Union, established in 1990, entered a phase of political structuring and officially became a political party in 1992. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of World War II, during the late 1940s and 1950s, several cultural and fine arts associations were founded with the aim of preserving and promoting Turkish culture and arts. Organizations such as *Yeni Yol* in Skopje and the *Kardaşlık* Cultural and Fine Arts Associations in Ohrid and Resen began organizing various activities to preserve Turkish traditions and customs. These associations operated in diverse areas such as drama and literature.

Following Macedonia's independence, the organizational revival of the Turkish community accelerated towards the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the establishment of new civil society organizations. Many of these newly formed associations began publishing their own periodicals. The early 2000s marked the emergence of the fourth generation of Macedonian Turkish poets and literary figures. In 2002, a group of students from the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje founded the literary, cultural, and artistic magazine *Köprü*, providing young writers and poets with a platform to publish their works.

Köprü magazine was first published in January 2002 in Skopje through the efforts of faculty member Hayati Yavuzer and students of the Department of Turkish Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology. In March 2003, it became an officially registered association under the name Köprü Association for Culture, Art, and Education. Initially published quarterly, it later adopted a monthly publication schedule (Demir & Kayadibi, 2012). In recent years, *Köprü* has continued to publish at irregular intervals.

Founded in August 2002 in Upper Banitsa, the Namık Efendi Association was established to support development in the fields of aid, education, culture, art, and sports. The association published a magazine titled *Dere* for a certain period (Çayırılı, 2015). The Niyazi Bey Cultural and Arts Association, established by Turkish youth in Resen, published a short-lived magazine called *Kızıl Elma*.

Since 1997, the Abdülhakim Hikmet Doğan Center for Culture and Arts in Gostivar has been publishing *Hikmet*, an international peer-reviewed academic journal. The journal features high-quality academic articles, reviews, critiques, and book introductions in fields such as Classical Turkish Literature, Modern Turkish Literature, Folk Literature, Turkish Language, Turkish-Islamic Literature, Contemporary Turkic Dialects, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature.

Üçüncüler, a magazine published by Macedonian Turkish youth beginning in 1994, continued its publication until 1999. As Ertuğrul Karakuş (2014) notes in his book *Üçüncüler in Macedonian Turkish Literature*, the authors of *Üçüncüler* generally adopted an independent stance and advocated for freedom and non-interference in their literary production.

The Ufuk Association, whose founding efforts began in November 2008 and which held its Founding General Assembly on December 17, 2008, launched *Ufuk* magazine in March 2009. The first four issues focused on literature and culture, while subsequent issues addressed social developments in Macedonia and included content related to the Turkish world. Initially published quarterly, the magazine was later published monthly at various intervals. The final issue of *Ufuk* (No. 37) was released in December 2021.

The Millennium Association was established in 1993 in Vrapçište by a group of idealistic youth and was officially recognized as a civil society organization in January 2000 under the civil society law enacted in 1998. The association aimed to promote peace, democracy, and interethnic dialogue through collaboration with youth via various projects and activities. For a period, it published a newspaper titled *Haberci*.

Turkish-Language Newspapers Published in Macedonia

Newspapers published in the Turkish language in Macedonia hold significant importance for the social, cultural, and political life of Turks living in Macedonia and the broader Balkan region. Following the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the region, Turks, now a minority in the country, have relied heavily on Turkish-language media to preserve their identity. From the time of the Ottoman withdrawal until the end of World War II, Turkish communities received education in Serbian rather than their mother tongue. During this period, Turkish was only spoken at home and in public spaces. Prior to 1941, newspapers published in Turkish using the Arabic script included *Hak*, *Hak Yolu*, *Işık*, *Sada-yi Millet*, *Mücadele*, *Yeni Vakit*, and *Doğru Yol* (Kaya, 1999).

The end of World War II, particularly December 1944, marked a turning point for Turkish communities in Macedonia. On December 23, 1944, the newspaper *Birlik* began publication, and on December 26, the Turkish-language *Tefeyyüz* primary school opened. The 1950s represented a period of renewed efforts and developments regarding Turkish-language initiatives. The publication of *Birlik* paved the way for other Turkish-language media and laid the foundation for the expansion of Turkish-language education throughout the country. Despite various challenges, Turkish-language press and media institutions developed under these conditions and continue to exist today. Since 1944, all newspapers and magazines published in Macedonia have used Standard Turkish (Turkey Turkish). These publications have fulfilled literary and cultural needs, preserved the Turkish language, and played a key role in safeguarding the community's linguistic identity.

Birlik Newspaper

The first issue of *Birlik* was published on December 23, 1944, with the slogan “Death to Fascism – Freedom to the People!” It was initially launched as the weekly newspaper of the National Liberation Front of the Muslims of Macedonia. Although it was intended to be published weekly, publication intervals varied—sometimes biweekly or monthly.

With the launch of *Birlik*, the first stirrings of Turkish literature in North Macedonia began. The newspaper made a significant contribution to the development of Balkan Turkish literature. It featured dedicated pages for children and students, as well as a *Children’s Garden* supplement. *Birlik* played a pioneering role in the publication of children’s magazines such as *Sevinç* and *Tomurcuk*, and with the later publication of *Sesler*, collections of folk literature began to appear regularly.

Birlik holds a special place in the collective memory and cultural heritage of Turks in Macedonia. It is one of the longest-running Turkish-language newspapers in the history of the Turkish press. After the bankruptcy of the *Nova Makedonija* public company, *Birlik* entered a privatization process that ultimately failed. The newspaper published its final issue—number 6,072—on March 18, 2004.

Throughout its 60-year publication history, *Birlik* not only significantly contributed to Balkan Turkish literature and children’s literature, but also documented the sociopolitical developments of the Turkish community in Macedonia. Despite occasional political propaganda, the newspaper consistently focused on educational and cultural activities relevant to the Turkish minority and witnessed the community’s organizational progress. It also spearheaded the publication of *Sesler* magazine, which ran from 1965 to 2001 with a total of 331 issues. *Sesler* is the longest-running magazine in the Balkans and continued publication—albeit irregularly—until April 2001.

Vardar Newspaper

Under the leadership of Kosovan-born Turkish journalist Burhan Sait, the *Vardar* magazine was first published in 1994 in Skopje, followed by the *Vardar* newspaper in 1999. As editor-in-chief and proprietor, Burhan Sait was critical of emigration from Yugoslavia to Turkey, arguing that it would further marginalize the Turkish minority. After the closure of *Vardar*, he became a citizen of Turkey and moved to Istanbul with his family in 2003 (Gezgin, 2023).

Although its publication lifespan was short, *Vardar* closely monitored the sociopolitical developments of Turks in Macedonia. Unfortunately, Burhan Sait died in a traffic accident in Turkey in 2004.

Yeni Balkan Newspaper

Following the closure of *Birlik*, which had played a critical role in documenting the history and development of the Turkish community in Macedonia, the *Yeni Balkan* newspaper was launched to fill the resulting gap in Turkish-language print media.

First published in 2004, *Yeni Balkan* initially appeared as a supplement to the *Yeni Dönem* newspaper in Kosovo. It later became an independent publication in Macedonia. The founder and editor-in-chief is Mürteza Sulooça, a former mufti of Resen. *Yeni Balkan* is published weekly and has contributed—albeit to a limited extent—to preserving Macedonian Turkish culture and sustaining Turkish literature. However, the newspaper has also occasionally featured political propaganda and applied editorial censorship toward certain political figures, ultimately leading to its discontinuation.

Turkish-Language Children's Magazines in Macedonia

Turkish literature, and specifically Turkish children's literature in Macedonia, began to develop in the aftermath of World War II. In this new post-war era, the right to mother-tongue education was granted, and Turkish-language schools were established. With the launch of the *Birlik* newspaper, a new period began, paving the way for the publication of children's magazines such as *Sevinç* and *Tomurcuk*, which specifically targeted young readers. The first periodical publication in Macedonian Turkish children's literature, *Pioneer*, began in 1950, using the Latin alphabet.

Within the framework of the renewed Turkish-language press and publishing activities beginning in 1944, *Pioneer* represents the starting point of children’s publishing in Macedonia. As the official publication of the Pioneers’ Union, the magazine aimed to spark children's interest in reading, writing, and literature. However, only ten issues were published. The lead article of the first issue was written by Mahmut Demir (Gürel, 2025).

Tomurcuk magazine began publication in 1957 and was founded by Necati Zekeriya. The main aim of the magazine was to help children in primary education better utilize the Turkish language. Published by Birlik Publishing in Skopje in 1957, the magazine sought to contribute to the education of Turkish children in the region. It was published ten times per year, excluding July and August. Some issues were combined editions (Okumuş, 2012).

Together with *Sevinç*, *Tomurcuk* played a vital role in the establishment of Turkish children's literature in North Macedonia. These magazines were instrumental in fostering the development of children's literature and nurturing new literary talents. However, following the privatization of the state-owned publishing company *Nova Makedonija*, the publication of *Tomurcuk* came to an end.

The children's magazine *Bahçe*, published by the *Yeni Balkan* Publishing House, released its first issue in 2004. The magazine's publisher is Mürteza Sulooça, who is also the proprietor of *Yeni Balkan* newspaper. To date, *Bahçe* has published 37 issues.

Kardelen magazine was launched in November 2009 by the *Köprü* Association. The magazine is edited by Yeliz Daut Kurtiş. Since its inception in 2009, *Kardelen* has published 113 issues to date.

CONCLUSION

Turkish-language print media in North Macedonia has undergone a rich historical development from the era of the Ottoman Empire to the present day and continues to maintain its presence. During the Ottoman period, the Turkish presence in the Balkans held significant importance, as Turks from Anatolia were resettled in the region through the Empire's settlement policies, allowing Turkish culture to take root. The foundations of Turkish-language press in the region were laid during the Ottoman era, with the establishment of printing houses and the publication of official newspapers in cities such as Bitola (Manastır) and Skopje (Üsküp), contributing to the emergence of a strong Turkish press tradition.

In particular, the newspaper *Birlik*, first published in 1944, holds a prominent place in the history of Turkish-language media in Macedonia. Today, despite various challenges, Turkish-language press in North Macedonia continues to exist. Thanks to the efforts of contemporary media institutions, the Turkish language and culture continue to be preserved and promoted in the region. However, current economic and social challenges pose significant threats to the sustainability and future of Turkish-language media.

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