JOURNALISM AFTER WIKILEAKS EXPERIENCE

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-Abstract-

In November of 2010, the correspondences between US Foreign Office and US Embassies were *leaked* to the sensational web site, WikiLeaks and a little while after they begun to be published. This case, that was named as the *11th September of the diplomacy* by Franco Frattini, who is the Italian foreign minister, caused a shock as strong as 9/11 at least. It not only triggered off series of hard and important security precautions in short term, but also seems to change all diplomatic dynamics in mid and long term. The political and international relations area is not the only domain on which this "cable-gate" had a significant impact; the global media (especially journalism) is another area that has to be considered as reshaping after WikiLeaks. Many scholars frequently argue that the new communication technologies and the exchanges that WikiLeaks brought out in the area of media will evoke the end of the conventional press. However, this study aims to argue a different point of view; that WikiLeaks experience has shown how the conventional press and new media technologies would co-operate.

An activist named Julian Assange founds WikiLeaks – it's rather to say hack-tivist - on December 3rd, 2006 as a global act movement. In his first manifest (Authoritarian power is maintained by conspiracy) Assange identifies an open-government idea. According to this idea, governments all around the world must be open and non-despotic. To gain this open government idea, the new communication technologies and the new media is extremely important. But the new media is not enough itself, it also requires the old conventional press, so the new media and conventional press have to co-operate to be more effective and powerful. While WikiLeaks was only depending on the power of global net at the beginning, especially after the big leaks in 2010, it seems that Assange and his web-phenomenon will collaborate tightly with conventional press. It thus seems that all these changes will give to conventional journalism a new path in the era of new media.

Key Words: *Communication Technologies, New Media, WikiLeaks, Journalism.*

JEL Classification: O3

1. INTRODUCTION

In November of 2010, the correspondences between US Foreign Office and US Embassies were *leaked* by an officer named *Bradley Manning* to the sensational web site, WikiLeaks and a little while after they begun to be published. This case, that was named as the *11th September of the diplomacy* by Franco Frattini, the Italian foreign minister, caused a shock as strong as 9/11 at least. It not only triggered off series of hard and important security precautions in short term, but also seems to change all diplomatic dynamics in mid and long term. The political and international relations area is not the only globally domain subject which this "cable-gate" had a significant impact; the global media (especially journalism) is another area that has to be considered as reshaping after WikiLeaks. Many scholars frequently argue that the new communication technologies and the exchanges that WikiLeaks brought out in the area of media will evoke the end of the conventional press. Because not only WikiLeaks acts globally for its "open government idea" and also it collaborates with the well-known actors of global media. The conventional newspaper and magazines such as *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *El Pais* and *Le Monde* have a strong partnership with WikiLeaks in its global act. However, this study aims to argue a different point of view; that WikiLeaks experience has shown how the conventional press and new media technologies would co-operate.

2. WIKILEAKS and the OPEN GOVERNMENT IDEA

It should look backwards to comprehend WikiLeaks and the changes that it'll most likely realize. An activist named Julian Assange founds WikiLeaks -it's rather to say *hack-tivist*- on December 3rd, 2006 as a global act movement. In his first manifest (*Authoritarian power is maintained by conspiracy*) Assange identifies an open-government idea. According to this idea, governments all around the world must be open and non-despotic: Where details are known as to the inner workings of authoritarian regimes, we see conspiratorial interactions among the political elite not merely for preferment or favor within the regime but as the primary planning methodology behind maintaining or strengthening authoritarian power. Authoritarian regimes give rise to forces which oppose them by pushing against the individual and collective will to freedom, truth and self realization. Plans which assist authoritarian rule, once discovered, induce resistance. Hence these plans are concealed by successful authoritarian powers. This is enough to define their behavior as conspiratorial. Thus it happens in matters of state; for knowing afar off (which it is only given a prudent man to do)

the evils that are brewing, they are easily cured. But when, for want of such knowledge, they are allowed to grow until everyone can recognize them, there is no longer any remedy to be found (Assange, 2006a: 2). Assange undertakes the matter again just at the last day of 2006: The more secretive or unjust an organization is, the more leaks induce fear and paranoia in its leadership and planning coterie. Hence in a world where leaking is easy, secretive or unjust systems are nonlinearly hit relative to open, just systems. Since unjust systems, by their nature induce opponents, and in many places barely have the upper hand, mass leaking leaves them exquisitely vulnerable to those who seek to replace them with more open forms of governance (Assange, 2006b: 1). Assange calls attention to possibilities of media against authoritarian regimes and/or governments. And consequently, to gain his open government idea, the new communication technologies and the new media is extremely important. But the new media is not enough itself; it also requires the *old* conventional press, so the new media and conventional press have to co-operate to be more effective and powerful. While WikiLeaks was only depending on the power of global net at the beginning, especially after the big leaks in 2010, it seems that Assange and his web-phenomenon will collaborate tightly with conventional press. It thus seems that all these changes will give to conventional journalism a new path in the era of new media.

3. THE COOPERATION of WIKILEAKS and GLOBAL MEDIA

Some thinkers argue that the “open government idea” of WikiLeaks’ itself is also should became a dictatorship. But nevertheless, they also bless the media. For instance, according to *Elisabeth Roudinesco*, an instructor from Paris-Diderot University, contends that media becomes to have a voice in the management of the global world as much as governments have and she also notes: foolishness of new dictators of openness should be blocked for the balance of privacy requirements and “serious” journalism. Despite all this, WikiLeaks deserves praises for what its cooperation with media. Global media and WikiLeaks tighten their links more and more especially after WikiLeaks had uncovered the corruptions of Tanzania and Kenya governments, and detect the tortures against Guantanamo prisoners by USA government and many more… When WikiLeaks revealed a secret video that was showing US air crew falsely claiming to have encountered a firefight in Baghdad and then laughing at the dead after launching an air strike that killed a dozen people, including two Iraqis working for *Reuter’s* news agency in April of 2010 (McGreal, 2010); it caused an early diplomatic quake in Middle-East. But on the other hand, this war crime started the process of

cooperation and the relationship between WikiLeaks and global press and this cooperation became more mighty and complicated in time. Just after this release, *New York Times* (USA), *The Guardian* (GB) and *Der Spiegel* (Germany) used their prestigious power and put out a series of news that came by 92.000 documents of WikiLeaks. There were very detailed documents about the actions of NATO unions in Afghanistan. Documents were leaked to WikiLeaks by an unknown military officer and before releasing, an offer for cooperation was made to these three media leaders by Julian Assange. All there have accepted this offer and they work on the documents around one month and they decided how they put out them. Global media and WikiLeaks released all the documents at the same day, in 25th of July. In November of 2010 they used the same strategy while they were realizing the biggest release action of internet history. This time the number of the leaked documents was around 250.000 and they were including many different subjects. So, the things were more though this time.

Meanwhile, just after WikiLeaks' revelation in July of 2010, conventional press and military specialists generally approach to the subject scornfully: "there is nothing new in these documents" for them. Maybe they really thought in this way or they were just struggling to keep their position on competition against *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *Der Spiegel*. Whatever the reason is, they put out the news to de-emphasize the documents and to depreciate the allegations. For instance, according to *Richard Cohen* from *Washington Post*; "the news in that massive data dump provided by the dauntingly mysterious Wikileaks (who? what?) to one American and two European publications is that there is no news at all" (Cohen, 2010). Even *New York Times* was sharing parallel critiques. Conversely, there were some journalists who were defending the idea of "openness" and the actions for it. An Australian journalist named *Joel Meares* denoted that there was no proper news about the war lately and also a thought as "*the average reader knows everything*" is contrary to interior logic of journalism. In *Columbia Journalism Review*, Meares emphasizes that; "to assume further that they would not benefit from the extra information the reports provide seems to argue against the very idea of journalism" (Meares, 2010). Consequently, the leaked documents become the focus point in journalism and ethics arguments. And also discussions about "process of journalism" started just after the release.

While conventional press and new communication technologies or new media were being compared frequently in that time, the important question should be formulated as: how a medium that has always suspicions about conventional media and even challenges that it has came to an end; begins to cooperate with it? Or, if WikiLeaks uploaded the documents to global net and waited for them to

spread out, it could be successful or not? The answers of these questions have a strong importance about the new path of journalism. On the other words, to share the responsibilities of leaked documents throw fresh light on the new process of journalism. First of all it has to be said that, *New York Times, The Guardian an Der Spiegel* have not only make easier to get, to read and to understand the documents and they've also guaranteed the security of them. Moreover, this cooperation realized that the new media needs the long-established experiences of conventional press. According to Jean-Claude Monod, senior fellow at the CNRS (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, France); the cooperation ofWikiLeaks and global media agents has a well-considered strategy. Internet is just like the giant in fairy tales and conventional press is like the giant's parents for Monod: "The giant is ultimately perceive that it's not a good idea to crash his own parents and decided to cooperate with them. And also WikiLeaks now know that to release everything just as they are, is not a good idea" (Karaca, 2010). It seems that WikiLeaks has adopted the same strategy: never release everything in a single action. Turkish journalist *Çınar Oskay* (from *Radikal*) points to the same transformation in action. In his opinion, Julian Assange, "*editor in chief of all journalists*" changes WikiLeaks strategy after the revelation of correspondences between U.S. Foreign Office and U.S. Embassies, and WikiLeaks releases the documents over time: "to release a big file over time… It is called "drop strategy": do not give all the news in one time and let the reader wait for it until the next day. A kind of *Chinese torture* (Oskay, 2010: 2).

In addition to WikiLeaks' changing strategy of revelation, also conventional press changes the process of expounding the documents and delivering the news. In July of 2010, while the revelation of NATO documents about Afghanistan, the professional staff of *The Guardian* straggle hardly to lodge the documents to the reader clearly. Because, there were highly amount of documents and they were complicated even for the professionals. 92.000 of documents should be analyzed even to distinguish the importance. They were written in a certain military jargon and hard to be recited not only for an average reader but also for the journalist too. The main objective is not to put out absolutely new and "flash" news, main purpose is to show to the reader how to analyze those gigantic 92.000 documents without losing his way. Therefore an enormous interactive map was created to demonstrate the deaths, attacks and key actions day by day. Also a color code was used to separate the subjects and victims (see figure-1). *David Leigh* the Guardian's investigations executive editor also generated an education video to show his journal's on-line capabilities.

Figure-1: A screenshot of interactive Afghanistan war logs mapped



Source: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/datablog/interactive/2010/jul/25/afghanistan-war-logs-events

According to another journalist, *Yenal Bilgici* from *Newsweek Türkiye*; journalism is not only to release the secret documents anymore. As it occurred in WikiLeaks experience, the documents can be leaked and released by someone and anybody can easily access to them (Bilgici, 2010: 40). Therefore the conventional press needs to perform more than this. Another interactive file, *Top Secret America*, that was put out by Washington Post in July of 2010 sets a good example of new journalism. Regarding to the editors; "*Top Secret America* is a project nearly two years in the making that describes the huge national security buildup in the United States after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The articles in this series and an online database at topsecretamerica.com depict the scope and complexity of the

government's national security program through interactive maps and other graphics. Every data point on the web site is substantiated by at least two public records (The Editors, 2010)." They used analyses, graphics, maps and videos to make clear the counterterrorist corporations' network of USA for reader (see figure-2). Consequently all these applications are good samples to show the capability differences between the new media and conventional press. These are the applications that conventional press can never perform on paper.

Figure-2: Interactive application's screenshot of *Top Secret America* investigation.



Source: http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/

4. CONCLUSION

All things considered, it is still early to declare the death of conventional press. It still has great power over governments and public. This means that, when new communication technologies and new media cooperate with conventional press

their gains increase more and more, in other words, this cooperation causes powerful effects. The leaked documents of WikiLeaks become more respectful and precious by the esteem and power of conventional global media. In December of 2010, Julian Assange declared some results of WikiLeaks and global media cooperation during an on-line conversation with *The Guardian* readers. Assange also declared that the sensational leaked documents have been edited by journalists and editors before putting out on newspaper. All the edition process is controlled by an editorial board just as used to be done in conventional press. This was never done before by WikiLeaks. It was regular to pun on leaked documents to web without an edition process. In my opinion, he is now aware of efficiency of their *brand new* cooperation with his *media partners* in his war against despotic governments. He focused on these subjects during the conversation. According to Assange, "The West" has *fiscalised* its basic power relationships through a web of contracts, loans, shareholdings, bank holdings and so on. "In such an environment it is easy for speech to be "*free*" because a change in political will rarely leads to any change in these basic instruments. Western speech, as something that rarely has any effect on power, is, like badgers and birds, free. In states like China, there is pervasive censorship, because speech still has power and power is scared of it (Assange, 2010). Thus, WikiLeaks proof that speech still has power after a long time. Nevertheless, the power of speech needs to be supported by the eternal power of writing. For the very reason, it is early to announce the death of conventional press.

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