

## Experts weigh in on launch of TRT Farsi

# Making entertainment or political programs?

**INTERVIEW** The launch of the TRT Farsi (TRT Farsi) television channel has raised many questions regarding the hidden motivations of this event and what goes on behind the scenes. Some say that such a media move by the northwestern neighbor of Iran is not particularly strange; however, from another perspective, it should be viewed with skepticism and caution.

In today's world, where media outlets are seen as a government's arms for furthering its soft power, it is not unusual for a country to launch a new outlet or channel in another language. On December 17, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) launched the Farsi-language TRT Farsi channel. According to the directors of this new media outlet, TRT Farsi has been launched to provide accurate, comprehensive, and unbiased content for over 130 million Farsi speakers worldwide. Prior to this, the Turkish state television network TRT and the Turkish state news agency Anadolu had Farsi-language programs.

TRT operates channels in various languages, including TRT World (in English), TRT Arabi, and TRT Kurdî. According to TRT's website, TRT Farsi is the 12th foreign language platform of this network and its ninth digital news channel. According to claims of TRT's directors, the network has managed to achieve 11 billion views and eight billion video views online and attract 60 million followers through 11 non-Turkish languages.

The network has promised that with the launch of its Farsi-language channel, it will provide a fresh perspective on history, culture, and art to the world of Farsi-speaking media.

Although more details about the channel's activities have not yet been announced, from the perspective of political-media analysis, some experts say that the network's activity may be aimed at influencing Iranian Azeri speakers — specifically those who consider themselves Turkish speakers. Others, however, dismiss this notion and believe that the Turkish state television, through the launch of a Farsi-language service, can contribute to goals such as boosting tourism in Turkey.



Musicians play a tune in the launch ceremony of Turkey's new Farsi-language channel, TRT Farsi, aired on December 17, 2024.

The first expert whom IRNA interviewed on this topic is Hamid Ziaiyarvar, an experienced journalist. What follows is the full interview translated by Iran Daily into English.



Hamid Ziaiyarvar

### Alien concept to those losing ground in media

According to Ziaiyarvar, in today's world, alongside political and military confrontation, a form of media confrontation can be seen as well. Countries strengthen their media to use them as an arm of soft power. Therefore, it is natural for a country like Turkey, which plays an important role in regional equations and political geography, to take the initiative to establish a presence in the media sphere and launch Farsi-language versions of its channels and media.

Recalling a memory, he says that in 1996, he was a field reporter at the inauguration of the Mashhad-Sarakhs-Tajik railway, which was held in Mashhad and attended by the presidents of regional coun-

tries. When the plane of Turgut Özal, the then-president of Turkey, was about to land in Mashhad, we were told that three planes were coming from Turkey; two planes were specifically for Turkish reporters and the third was carrying the Turkish president. It was really surprising and astonishing to all of us that Turkey had so many media outlets and reporters that two planes were coming to Iran. I remember that at that time, Iranian reporters and other news agencies were lost among the Turkish reporters. If Turkey had such a media presence back then, it's clear that there was a good understanding of the importance of media there.

"These days, just one Turkish TV station has around 700 sat-

ellite channels that produce programs on various topics, including sports, politics, social affairs, and news. A country that reaches media maturity would launch a television channel for every language. I don't know the exact number of their channels in other languages now, but I know they have channels in different languages."

He added, "Because we are weak in our media efforts, we think Turkey is doing strange things, while such a move is somewhat customary. Of course, I also know that the soft power of countries, one of which is media, might be used by Turkey later, but at first glance, they are trying to display their power and benefit from it. We also have an international broadcasting depart-

ment at the IRIB, which produces programs in languages such as French, English, Urdu, Turkish, and so on. Therefore, one cannot view the launch of this channel too skeptically."

The media expert, noting that he doubts this channel will gain popularity and audience in the formal media sphere, maintained that TRT Farsi will likely focus on entertainment programs and shows that appeal to a specific Iranian class to attract an audience and, ultimately, through this, attract more Iranian tourists to Turkey. "For example, it will focus on the tourist attractions of Turkey," he added.

Since TRT is Turkey's state television broadcaster, Ziaiyarvar believes that it will follow the positions of the Turkish government in times of

crises, ranging from challenges related to the Republic of Azerbaijan to border and political disputes, and will serve as an amplifier for the voice of the Turkish government in Farsi.

Claiming that the Turks are trying to speak directly to the Iranian people through this network, he pointed out, however, that ordinary Iranians know Turkey through entertainment channels and TV series. "So, I doubt that the Iranian people will have much interest in the news section of TRT Farsi."

"I believe the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation is not very popular among the Iranian people when it comes to news. Even if they try their hand in this direction, which I find unlikely, they will not succeed in the end," he concluded.

### Dangers of staying on surface layer

Salar Seyfoddini, who holds a Ph.D. in Political Geography and Geopolitics from Tarbiat Modares University, also gave his two cents on the issue. Seyfoddini explains that while scholars of information science might see the launch of channels in different languages as a natural occurrence, we should be a bit skeptical about it.

"Governments do not invest in any sector without a reason. Perhaps the initial and surface-level goal of this event would be to boost Turkish tourism by showcasing Turkish tourist attractions to Iranians, but we must see that this trend will continue. Media is the soft power of governments, but we should not view this soft power too optimistically. For example, we should consider when and for what issues TRT Arabi was established and what the final outcome was. A simple review will reveal many points. How did the war in Syria start 10 years ago? How did the government of Bashar al-Assad



Fahrettin Altun, head of media and communications in the Turkish presidency, speaks at the launch ceremony of Turkey's new Farsi-language channel, TRT Farsi.

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fall? We need to look at these issues more closely."

The expert predicts that Turkey will not use TRT Farsi only for tourism purposes or to broadcast TV series and films and will, in the near future, after at-

tracting an audience, use it as a power game. Seyfoddini cites the presence of specific guests at the TRT Farsi launch ceremony as one reason for this prediction, asking: Why should pan-Turkists and separatists be present at the

launch of this channel?

He notes that Iran had had the Sahar TV which broadcasted in Azeri and Turkish, but the country pulled the plug on it. "Given Turkey's recent actions, I think it is necessary for us to revive the

Sahar TV in Turkish or launch a new Turkish-language channel," he maintained.

The scholar further explained his position, "TRT Farsi may initially attract an audience by broadcasting entertainment programs and Turkish TV series, which I think media experts see as the first level of this event. However, this soft power will eventually evolve into a level of influence and become a real issue. Once the media finds an audience, it programs for its supporters and works in the interest of its target society, sometimes even influencing our country's officials to the point where they might say, for example, that a certain Turkish channel is right. This is not pessimism but a reality with a long history."

Seyfoddini anticipates that Turkey will soon take actions affecting Iran's national interests, for example, in northern Iraq, inside Iran, or in the South Caucasus. "Ankara will certainly need a platform to activate such operations, and at that time, TRT Farsi will be a useful tool."



Salar Seyfoddini