



I.P.I.  
TÜRKİYE

# Victory is Something to be Borne

Exploring a Century of Press  
Freedom in Turkey on the  
Republic's 100th Anniversary

ÖZGÜR BASIN VARSA, ÖZGÜR TOPLUM VARDIR  
THERE CAN BE NO FREE SOCIETY WITHOUT FREE JOURNALISM

# “Victory is Something to be Borne”

Exploring a Century of Press  
Freedom in Turkey on the  
Republic’s 100th Anniversary

IPI REPORT

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On the cover of the IPI Report published in April 1961, there was the first post-war meeting of Turkish and Greek journalists.



IPI Turkey chair Abdi İpekçi would be assassinated as he was busy working to repeat this historic meeting 18 years later.

# Remembering Seven Decades with IPI Turkey on the Centennial of the Republic

## ▶ Emre KIZILKAYA

No organization has witnessed the evolution of democracy and freedom of the press in the Republic of Turkey as closely as the International Press Institute (IPI) has, and no one has supported their development with such a deep expertise in journalism and sincere sensitivity as IPI.

Ahmet Emin Yalman, a co-founder of IPI, wrote the first doctoral thesis on journalism in Turkey in 1914 at Columbia University, now boasting the world's top journalism school. Yalman was also one of the founders of the Ottoman Press Society, the first professional journalism organization in Turkey.

Yalman, who had

supported Turkey's War of Liberation from the very beginning and had even been personally invited by Atatürk to observe the Great Offensive, which crowned the final battle with a decisive victory, was the only journalist invited to the frontlines. Throughout his life, he consistently took a stance in favor of democracy and freedoms. He resisted all forms of pressure in pursuit of independent and professional journalism, rejected political duties, and opposed extremism of any kind. He paid the price for insisting on ethical journalism by occasionally going to prison, sometimes being banned from his profession, and even once surviving an assassination attempt.

After the Second World

War, as a new world was being established and Turkey was transitioning to a multi-party democracy, Yalman, in October 1950, co-founded the International Press Institute (IPI) at Columbia University in New York with 34 journalists from 15 countries. The goal of these journalists was to create the first international network of solidarity and cooperation to defend press freedom and promote quality journalism across the globe, believing that a free media would contribute to building a better and more peaceful world.

IPI is one of the oldest and most widespread organizations advocating for media freedom worldwide. Throughout its first seven decades, it has had its head-

quarters in Zurich, London, and now in Vienna. IPI's true strength lies in its global membership network, which includes hundreds of respected journalists in nearly 100 countries and its national committees in 15 countries across 4 continents.

From the days of apartheid in South Africa to the military junta era in Greece, from the coup period in Myanmar to Palestine and Israel during the First Intifada, IPI has stood by journalists who were imprisoned, censored, intimidated, oppressed and killed in almost every country during the toughest times and under the harshest conditions.

IPI was the organization that first brought together French-German and Jap-

anese-Korean journalists after World War II, initiated the largest journalism training program in Africa during the 1970s, and established support networks for journalists in conflict areas such as the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Ukraine in the 2000s.

In 1976, IPI was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize due to its international efforts for peace and understanding. Our colleague Maria Ressa from the Philippines, with whom we have worked on the IPI Executive Board, was awarded this prize in 2021 with the Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov.

IPI has been a trailblazer in conducting comprehensive and long-term research on the state of journalism worldwide for many years. Starting from 1952, the "IPI Report" began systematically recording press freedom violations around the world for the first time. In 1953, the inaugural "The Flow of the News" global survey was prepared, making it the first of its kind.

In 2006, IPI received an Emmy Award in the "News and Documentary" category, further highlighting its pioneering role. IPI General Assemblies and World Congresses, where all members are invited and have a say, are unique journalistic experiences held in different cities. Among these, the 1989 IPI General Assembly held in Berlin months before the fall of the Wall and the 1994 IPI General Assembly in Cape Town, where Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk addressed the audience, stand out as unforgettable examples.

IPI's missions for press freedom have had a significant impact worldwide for over 70 years. For instance, successful IPI missions were organized in the 1960s to address severe press freedom violations in Czechoslovakia, in the 1970s against defamation and libel



*In the 1960s, as the Cyprus issue flared up, journalists from 50 countries who were IPI members raised a unified voice against the Cypriot Greek authorities' arrest and harassment of Turkish Cypriot journalists.*

laws targeting journalists in the UK, in the 1980s for newly democratized African countries, in the 1990s for Eastern Europe, and in the 2000s all around the world from Spain, Mexico and Russia to Ethiopia, Bangladesh and the Philippines.

Established "by journalists, for journalists," IPI is one of the oldest independent international organizations. It has held consultative status on media freedom at the United Nations and the Council of Europe for many years. In recent times, with an increasing awareness of the fact that the news ecosystem is threatened not only by governments but also by corporations, IPI's work holds accountable monopolistic and surveillance-oriented digital platforms that extend from countries like the United States and China to the whole world.

Where do we stand in this picture? There is no doubt that Turkey has been one of the most important countries for IPI for over 70 years. In the late 1950s, journalists in Turkey, including Yalman, were imprisoned solely for their reporting, and they found IPI member colleagues from all over the world firmly by their side. Turkish-Greek journalists were first brought together by IPI in 1961 after the war. When terrorism, coups, and authoritarian regimes tightened their grip on democra-



*IPI has always been a pioneer and visionary for media freedoms. The September 1965 issue of the IPI Report drew attention to the subject of automation and artificial intelligence in the media with the headline. According to a survey with IPI member journalists then, it was predicted that artificial intelligence will create more job positions in the media and make us better journalists.*

cy in Turkey in the subsequent years, IPI continued to be one of the most vocal defenders of press freedom, no matter the cost.

Ahmet Emin Yalman used to say, "The need of nations is not to cover up existing evils and numb the public, but to reveal, diagnose and treat them." Since 1950, the IPI Turkey National Committee, whose presidency he held for many years, has continuously existed in various forms, sometimes informally as a professional community and sometimes officially as an association or institute, depending on the circumstances of the time.

The priceless value of this existence for journalism in Turkey cannot be denied. For instance, IPI had a role in shaping the first document that defined journalistic principles in Turkey. In 1960, Turkey's Journalists Association (TGC) invited IPI to assist in preparing and overseeing the implementation of a document titled the "Press Code of Ethics" and establishing a "Press Honor Council." A working group led by Allan Hernelius, the Chair of IPI's Swedish National Committee then, prepared these documents after their studies in Turkey.

IPI's work in Turkey has been so successful that in the subsequent years, many other countries, including Canada, Denmark, Greece, Kenya, and South Africa, took it as a model while establishing their own self-regulatory bodies for journalists. In the meantime, TGC adopted the 9-point document prepared by IPI as the "Journalists' Code of Ethics" during its General Assembly on February 14, 1972. Today, the history of the "Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities of Journalists" on TGC's website, which is the fundamental document for news media standards in Turkey, begins by acknowledging IPI's contribution.



*IPI frequently cited its activities in Turkey as an example to its national committees worldwide.*

Turkey has played a pivotal role in various other activities of IPI as well. The IPI General Assemblies in 1964 and 2007, with the participation of numerous media representatives from around the world and even important decision-makers, including prime ministers of the time, were held in Turkey. From brave statements protesting legal regulations limiting the press during the military junta in Turkey in the 1980s to reports that, for the first time, substantiated the biased practices of digital platforms undermining media freedom in the 2020s, IPI has also stood out with its publications.

Throughout these efforts, IPI has always worked hand in hand with leading journalism organizations in Turkey and around the world. The Turkish-language bulletin "Press World," jointly published by TGC and IPI in the 1960s, was one of the initial examples of this collaboration. In 1970, TGC and IPI co-authored and published a brief history of journalism education in Tur-

key. For years, the Istanbul (later Turkey) Journalists' Union's (TGS) publishing house printed IPI Turkey reports.

In the past 20 years, alongside TGC and TGS, prominent organizations from Turkey such as the Press Council and the Journalists' Association (GC) in Ankara, as well as international organizations like Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), have made an impact through collaborative efforts with IPI. For example, IPI Turkey was one of the pioneers of the "Platform for Freedom of Journalists" (GÖP) established in 2010 by bringing together 94 journalism professional organizations in the country.

IPI received Turkey's Press Freedom Award, which TGC first presented in 1989, in the institutional category. In 2016, the International Press Freedom Organizations Coalition, which includes IPI, was honored with the same award. To date, no institution based

outside Turkey has received this award.

Throughout its history of over 70 years, we pay our respects to the pioneering journalists who have served on the IPI Turkey leadership, such as Ahmet Emin Yalman, Abdi İpekçi, Şevket Rado, Metin Toker, Hasan Cemal, Necati Zincirkıran, Sami Kohen, Altan Öymen, Gül Demir, Zafer Atay, Ferai Tınç, and Kadri Gürsel, as well as IPI Press Freedom Heroes like Hrant Dink and communication science gurus like Prof. Dr. Nermin Abadan, who contributed to the organization.

We express our gratitude to everyone who has made significant efforts to protect and strengthen journalism in Turkey during their tenure on the international management of IPI, from Armand Gaspard to Peter Galliner, Carl-Eugen Eberle and Barbara Trionfi. I also fondly remember Sir Harold Evans, whom I had the honor of spending a joyous time at the IPI World Congress in Vienna in 2010, along with Peter Preston and John Yearwood, with whom I had the privilege of working during their leadership of the Turkey press freedom missions in 2012 and 2017, respectively.

What would these exemplary individuals do if they were active journalists and advocates for press freedom in the challenging conditions of Turkey in 2023? I believe that we can find the answers in the history of Turkey and IPI, which will undoubtedly remain relevant in the future.

Shortly before he was assassinated in Istanbul in 1979, our chair Abdi İpekçi, who had just returned from Ankara in preparation for a meeting to bring together Turkish and Greek journalists, said, "The way to protect press freedom is self-regulation."

The fundamental reason why İpekçi opposed the establishment of the Press

Advertisement Institution (BIK) in 1963 was his heartfelt belief that journalists can only be self-regulated in a democracy. IPI experts Oscar Polak and Olivier Reverdin came to Turkey that year at the invitation of the Turkish government and conducted field research, later stating in their reports, published by TGS, that “the oddest thing is the official advertisement system” in this country, which has been weaponized by Turkish governments as a leverage over news media for decades.

The words of Abdi İpekçi, whose IPI membership card you can see today at the TGC Press Museum, highlighting the importance of self-regulation in the media to protect press freedom and strengthen quality journalism, are in line with the vision of the Republic developed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. “The means of eliminating the disadvantages that will arise from press freedom is also press freedom itself,” Atatürk had said in 1924.

To elevate the standards of journalism and to protect the freedom of the press, self-regulation ought to be complemented with national and international collaboration and solidarity among journalists.

When I became an IPI member in the early 2000s at the invitation of Ferai Tınç, we focused our activities, influenced by the relatively positive environment of press freedom, on areas such as digital journalism training. In the subsequent years, as the situation deteriorated, we emphasized press freedom missions, visited imprisoned journalists, organized advocacy events in many cities from Izmir to Diyarbakır, issued statements, and conducted seminars in areas such as peace journalism. Like our first chair Yalman, my predecessor Kadri Gürsel was also imprisoned for



*In 1963, IPI Turkey was established as the “Turkish Press Institute” and later obtained a special status as the “Turkey Press Institute.”*

his commitment to quality journalism.

Today, while proudly commemorating this rich history as the first Turkish journalist to have served as Vice-Chair on the IPI’s Executive Board after an iconic figure like Abdi İpekçi, I believe that in the second century of the Republic, the new generation of journalists in Turkey will carry the flag of free press with honor. They will create a more perfect Republic and democracy with an independent media and quality journalism.

Is it easy? Certainly not. And is it worth it?

American journalist Eugene Pulliam visited Turkey at the end of 1958 and, after perceiving that Prime Minister Adnan Menderes’

aides treated him and his wife poorly, he returned to his country and wrote a harsh editorial criticizing Ankara. Many journalists, including Yalman, who was a colleague of Pulliam at IPI, bravely covered this editorial as a news story in Turkish, leading to their trial. Two newspapers, including Yalman’s Vatan, and two magazines, including IPI member Metin Toker’s Akis, were shut down temporarily due to these reports. The convicted journalists were then sent one by one to Toptaşı and Cebeci prisons.

Time magazine in the United States reported on the “Pulliam Trial” on its issue dated March 21, 1960, explaining to a global audience that Yalman, a journalist for

53 years, returned to his country to serve a 15-month prison sentence ironically on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the first independent newspaper in Turkey. Yalman, who was ready to go to prison at the age of 71, cut short his trip to Pakistan and went back to Turkey to serve his sentence where he solemnly explained to his colleagues:

“Being locked up in a cell is certainly not a pleasant and trivial thing. However, for a century, the path of rights and freedom struggle in Turkey has always passed through banishments and prisons. Being able to walk in the footsteps of Mithat Pashas, Namık Kemals, and Ziya Pashas is a blessing and an honor.”



*Journalists gathered in front of the sculpture of journalist Hasan Tahsin, who fired the first bullet at Greek forces in Izmir in 1919, to protest the so-called disinformation law. June 21, 2022, Izmir.*

# TURKISH PRESS BETWEEN 1920-1970

## ► Dr. Recep YAŞAR

To control Journalism, and for rulers to use it as a tool of propaganda, are the perennial aspirations of all powers. Authoritarians want their people to remain uninformed, in order to maintain their power. Yet, journalists keep people informed.

Another fundamental duty of journalism is "public scrutiny". In democratic societies, public scrutiny is as critical as administrative oversight and judicial review in order to keep the ruling power within the boundaries of the law.

The ruling powers are bothered by the work of journalists, and to exercise public scrutiny in the service of the public.

This attitude, prevalent across the world, has also been adopted historically by every ruling power in Turkey, and journalism has been besieged by crackdowns and intimidations. At times,

laws have been imposed in an attempt to legitimize such a siege. At other times, laws have been violated, and pressures on journalists were normalized.

Journalists who have resisted these strictures have been taken into custody, detained, sentenced to years in prison, tortured, assaulted, threatened and murdered. The Press Museum in Istanbul is full of pictures of murdered journalists.

The period between 1920-1970, which witnessed the evolution of the modern printing press to the development of mass media, can be summarized as follows:

### **1918-1923: Armistice of Mudros and the War of Independence**

The Armistice of Mudros, signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Powers on 30 October 1918 ushered in a new era. Leading supporters of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which

established single-party rule before the First World War began, fled the country, as many regions were occupied. On 13 November 1918, the British and French navies entered Istanbul.

The occupation also affected the press, fracturing their institutions, a fact that was suppressed by both the Istanbul Government and the occupying forces. Journalists were split into two camps; proponents and opponents of the Turkish War of Independence.

The dailies İleri, Yeni Gün, Akşam and Vakit supported the War of Independence, while others, including Peyâm-ı Sabah, Alemdar and Türkçe İstanbul criticized it harshly. And yet another group of journalists advocated for American or British protectorate status.

These journalists, including Halide Edib, Dr. Celal Muhtar, Refik Halit Karay, Celal Nuri, Necmettin Sadak, Velid

Ebüzziya, Ahmet Emin Yalman and Yunus Nadi established the Wilson's Principles Society, and sent a letter to US President Woodrow Wilson asking that the US govern Turkey for at least 15 years.

Conversely, Ali Kemal, a journalist who studied in Paris and Geneva, believed that salvation would come with British protectorate status. In his article in the daily Sabah on 9 November 1918, Ali Kemal wrote, "As far as the Ottoman State is concerned, we recognize two political entities: the union of nations at the internal level, and the friendship of the British at the external level".

Ali Kemal was kidnapped when Istanbul was under occupation. He was taken to İzmit for questioning and trial. While he was being taken to prison, the party was intercepted, and he was lynched in a plot hatched by Nurettin Pasha.

In a span of five decades,



five journalists were killed, namely 'İştirakçi' (Socialist) Hüseyin Hilmi, Ali Şükrü Bey, Hikmet Şevki and Sabahattin Ali, as well as the aforementioned Ali Kemal.

The Turkish War of Independence led to the birth of a new press establishment in Anatolia. The inability of the Istanbul Government to rule over Anatolia paved the way for the development of the Anatolian press, which sided with the Turkish War of Independence. So much so that it was Osman Nevres, also known as Hasan Tahsin, head writer at the daily Hukuk-u Beşer, who fired the first bullet at Greek forces in Izmir on 15 May 1919.

Instructed by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), who believed in the importance of the press for the War of Independence, the dailies İrade-i Milliye and Hakimiyet-i Milliye started being published on September 4, 1919 and January 10, 1920, respectively. Hakimiyet-i Milliye was the government's official broadcasting organization.

Anadolu Agency, Turkey's state news agency, was established on April 6, 1920. Named by Mustafa Kemal, the agency had two major aims: Taking measures against provocations that could jeopardize national unity, and informing the public about the War of Independence.

### Early years of the Republic

During the early years of the Republic, the press was under the complete control of the founders of the new state. It is not possible to run a free press under single-party rule, which uses the press as a tool to reshape society.

The Constitution, adopted a year after the proclamation of the Republic on 20 April 1924, states in Article 77: "The Press is free by law and is not subject to audit or review before publication", nevertheless, the government set the limits for what the press could or could not publish.

It was years before a new press law could be adopted

after the proclamation of the Republic. Over time, the Printing Law of 1909 went through amendments, yet remained in effect until 1931. The government continued to hold a tight rein over the press with the help of the Independence Tribunals and the Law on the Maintenance of Order.

### Istanbul Independence Tribunal and the Law on the



### Maintenance of Order

On December 5, 1923, the dailies Tanin and İkdam, and on December 6, the daily Tevhid-i Efkâr published letters by Sayyid Amir Ali and Aga Khan, leaders of Indian Muslims in the United Kingdom, advocating for the caliphate. Then-Prime Minister İsmet İnönü considered the publication of these letters as an interference in the internal affairs of the country, and asked for the prosecution of the journalists under the Treason Law. On December 8, 1923, the parliament passed a motion to establish an Independence Tribunal in Istanbul. Thus, the first Independence Tribunal of the Republican Era began by prosecuting journalists.

On the same day, owners and managing directors of these newspapers, Hüseyin Cahit, Ahmet Çevdet, Velid Ebüzziyya and Ömer İzzettin, were detained. Lütfi Fikri, the Chair of the Istanbul Bar Association, was taken into custody. The prosecutor demanded that the journalists stand trial under Article 1 of the Treason Law.

The Istanbul Independence Tribunal found the journalists not guilty, and entered an acquittal on the grounds that the element of intent was

absent. The Tribunal said that the journalists had not acted with willful and subversive intent or with the purpose of committing treason when they published the letter, but only acted to avoid "missing a scoop".

The Law on the Maintenance of Order, the first anti-terrorism law of the Republic, was passed by the parliament on March 4, 1925.

This law granted extraordinary powers to the government, allowing it to limit the freedom of the press upon a whim, and to close down newspapers as it pleased. Furthermore, it could make unlawful decisions via Independence Courts.

1925 saw anti-government demonstrations in Ankara and Istanbul, while the Sheikh Said Rebellion broke out in the eastern provinces, demanding independence for Kurds. The Government pointed its finger at the Istanbul Press as the responsible party behind these events.

On March 6, 1925, a day after the adoption of the Law on the Maintenance of Order, six Istanbul newspapers were closed. The government established new Independence Tribunals, and continued to put journalists on trial. When the daily Tanin published a news story with the headline "Terakkiperver (Progressive) Party is raided", its editorial director, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, and managing directors stood trial at the Ankara Independence Tribunal. On March 7, 1925, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın was sentenced to life in exile in the Black Sea province of Çorum, while the managing directors were sentenced to two years in prison.

Meanwhile, Zekeriya Sertel, the owner and editorial director of Resimli Hafta magazine, was exiled to the Black Sea province of Sinop, and Cevat Şakir, widely-known by his pen-name 'The Fisherman of Halicarnassus', was exiled to the Aegean coastal town of Bodrum.

Journalists held responsible for the Sheikh Said Rebellion were tried at the Elazığ Independence Tribunal, which was known as the Independence Tribunal for the Rebellious Region. On 19 June 1925, the Tribunal ordered that Velid Ebüzziyya from the daily Tevhid-i Efkâr; Sadri Ertem, Fevzi Lütfi Karaosmanoğlu and İlhami Safa from the daily Son Telgraf; Eşref Edip from the daily Sebilürreşad, and Abdulkadir Kemali from the Adana-based daily Toksöz be immediately detained and sent to Elazığ.

The Independence Tribunal for Rebellious Region subsequently ruled for the closure of Vatan Daily and the detention of Ahmet Emin (Yalman), Ahmet Şükrü (Esmer), İsmail Muştak (Mayokan), Suphi Nuri (İleri) to be sent to the Eastern Anatolian Elazığ province.

Zekeriya Sertel, in the first edition of the daily Son Posta, which he published with his three friends, wrote the following to describe this period of time:

"You could not act out of line with the instructions given to head writers over the phone. A newspaper would be shut down for weeks, and journalists would be taken to court for just a little mistake. In other words, people couldn't breathe. They were suffocating because of a lack of air, and of freedom."

### The Printing Law

In the 1930s, as the era dominated by the Law on the Maintenance of Order ended, dissenting voices began to emerge in the press. This did not sit well with the government, which was further disturbed when the Liberal Republican Party was founded

on 12 August 1930 by Ali Fethi Okyar upon the request of Mustafa Kemal. The government amended the Printing Law to silence both the press and the opposition.

The new law adopted on July, 25, 1931 facilitated an intensified systematic control of the press, making it easier to shutter newspapers. The press was turned into a propaganda tool for the Republican People's Party (CHP) under the Printing Law.

This period also saw the passing of articles 141, 142 and 163 of the Turkish Penal Code, which has swung the sword of Damocles over the head of the Turkish press for many long years.

The notorious articles 141 and 142, based on the 1930 Italian Penal Code from the Fascist era, were included in the Penal Code in 1936, introducing bans on opinions and class politics. The concept of "thought crime" was created based on this amendment. Articles 141 and 142 were invoked to penalize "leftist" activities, whereas Article 163 was used to penalize "religion-based reactionary" activities.

In 1938, new amendments were made to the Printing Law. On June 28, 1938, the draft bill became law, but no members of parliament took the floor during the parliamentary deliberation.

The new regulation required a press organization to obtain a prior license from the government, and a bank letter of guarantee involving huge amounts of money in order to publish a newspaper. In addition, the concept of "disreputation" was introduced. People who were ruled "to have a bad reputation" by government agents would not be able to own a newspaper or work in papers or magazines as reporters, writers, painters, photographers, proofreaders or administrative directors.

Following these decisions, the Directorate General of Press and Publications started to determine what news

stories to run in the papers or even what headlines to carry or what font to use.

Not satisfied with the amendments to the Printing Law, the government brought in regulations that profiled journalists, and required that journalists obtain licenses to perform their duty. The Press Association was established and presented as a "self-control" mechanism for journalists. However, the Press Association drew its strength from the law, and its senior-level management consisted of executives of the ruling party or members of parliament.

The Press Association was established in line with



totalitarian and authoritarian trends across the world at the time, and was, in fact, a forced professional organization that aimed to bring journalists under state control.

### The Second World War

The idea in Europe that the Second World War was a war between fascism and democracies was also reflected in the Turkish media. The dailies Akşam, Vatan and Tanin favored the Allied powers while some writers in Tasvîr-i Efkâr and Cumhuriyet dailies supported the Germans. The daily Tan, a pro-Allies newspaper, was against both fascism and capitalist imperialism. The paper ran stories that praised Soviet friendship. During this period, the government further intensified its repression of the press.

### Raiding of the daily Tan

The raiding of the daily Tan was a major event during

the course of the CHP's single-party rule. Owned by Zekeriya Sertel, the daily ran stories accusing CHP members of corruption, and published articles on the founding of the Democrat Party (DP), and on Soviet friendship. This rhetoric eventually disturbed the government.

On December 3, 1945, pro-CHP journalist Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın wrote an article titled "Kalkın Ey Ehli Vatan" (People of the Motherland, rise up!) in the daily Tanin. He was referring to the daily Tan, which "had to be silenced".

Previously, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın had been sent into exile in Çorum by the Anka-

Eventually, both the Sertels, and the daily's managing directors were convicted. The Court of Cassation overruled the conviction, and they were released four months later.

### Transition to a multi-party system

With the advent of a multi-party era, CHP, the ruling party of the single-party period, and the Democrat Party (DP), founded by Celal Bayar on 7 January 1946, started to compete for the support of the press.

DP Leader Celal Bayar said that "the Press Law today is a far cry from ensuring a free press. We, the Democrats, will bring the free press law", while Adnan Menderes stated, "Where there is no free press, the rights and freedoms of citizens would be in jeopardy, and the social life would be doomed to rot due to the dirt and rust of secrecy and concealment".

In the face of the statements by the opposition, the prevalent unrest in society, and the upcoming election, the government amended the Election Law, the Law on General Assemblies and the Press Law, while also abolishing the Press Association. A legislative amendment was introduced, which gave power to courts to shutter newspapers.

The international environment also forced the CHP to take these steps. This new period in the aftermath of the Second World War gave rise to a more vigorous press establishment.

In 1941, Turkey had 113 newspapers and 227 magazines, with an overall readership of 60 thousand. In 1946, the daily total circulation rose to around 100 thousand, and the numbers of newspapers and magazines went up to 202 and 302, respectively.

Two powerhouse newspapers were established during this period: On May 1, 1948, Sedat Simavi launched the trailblazing daily Hürriyet, whereas Ali Naci Karacan launched the daily Milliyet two years later.

ra Independence Tribunal. During his exile, he translated French texts for the Ministry of National Education. When the hat revolution took place, he demonstrated his support by having hats brought from Istanbul and wearing them. His exile was lifted after journalist Hakkı Tarık Us vouched for him.

On the morning of December 4, following Yalçın's article and a call made by the CHP Provincial Organization, a group of ten thousand people gathered at Istanbul University's campus in Beyazıt Square and raided Tan. Turkey's biggest rotary presses were torn apart with axes, chisels and sledgehammers. The linotype machines were smashed, and rolled paper bobbins were thrown on the streets. The daily Tan ceased its publication after the attack.

The government had the Sertel couple detained for causing the incident. Two lawsuits were filed against them.

## The Democrat Party Era

The contrast between the single-party system's pressure on journalists and the newly-established Democrat Party's emphasis on a free press caused the DP to win the support of the press when it ran in the elections of May 1950. In a landslide victory, the DP won 416 of the 487 seats in parliament.

One of the first actions that the DP took was to draft a new press law. On July 21, 1950, the new Press Law took effect, releasing the government's tight rein on the press. A new law was introduced to regulate the economic and social rights of journalists, and their right to form a trade union.

No journalists were detained during the DP's first term in government - what newspapers called "the honeymoon period". However, it was short-lived, especially as newspapers started covering the economic downturn, the black market, profiteering, and social unrest over corruption allegations.

The then-Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who had a good relationship with newspaper owners, contested the publication of these news stories. Journalists, however, were not bound by the relationship between the prime minister and their bosses, and continued to publish such stories freely. Consequently, the DP introduced new legal regulations, passing a dozen amendments to both the press law and other laws that ramped up the repression of journalists.

Eventually, DP's policies became harsher than those it was critical of when it was in the opposition. Following the 1954 elections, it placed the press under strict control.

The government was punishing the opposition press while rewarding the pro-government press. It not only provided support to pro-government dailies in the form of public notices, ink and printing but also provided them with subsidies: 55K liras to were

given to the daily Havadis for its establishment, 147K liras to Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, 100K liras to Orhan Seyfi Orhan and Yusuf Ziya Ortaç, and 45K liras to Türk Düşüncesi and Peyami Safa etc....

While some opposition newspapers did not have recourse to public notices or advertisements, others had to cut their circulation due to the lack of paper. This period went down in history as "the hiring press".

In the second half of the DP government's rule, 2,300 litigations were filed, which resulted in the conviction of 287 journalists. The Journalists' Union was closed. For the first time in the history of the Republic, a journalist, Ahmet Emin Yalman, was targeted in an armed attack. The assault was tied to concessions given to conservatives by the DP government.

The DP's crackdown on the press was also noticed internationally. American journalist Eugene Pulliam visited Turkey in September 1958 to discuss these developments with Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. Pulliam had to leave Turkey without meeting with Menderes, but he published his observations in the daily Indianapolis, commenting that Turkey was regressing down a dangerous path. His articles were quoted in 72 newspapers in the USA, and their Turkish translations were published in Turkey. Menderes reacted strongly and instructed the prosecutors to launch an investigation into the newspapers that published Pulliam's remarks. The dailies Ulus, Vatan, Akis and Kim were shuttered for certain periods. Imprisonment sentences were handed down to Şahap Balcıoğlu, Selami Akpınar, Naim Tiralı and Ahmet Emin Yalman.

Even in times of martial law, however, the DP was dissatisfied by the extent of the pressure and censorship against the opposition and the press. To this end, it established the Commission of Investigation, composed of DP deputies, in April 1960.

The Commission was given the power to impose bans or shutter all types of publications, confiscate printing and publishing equipment, as well as make decisions regarding assemblies and demonstrations. The decisions of the Commission were final, and could not be appealed.

Decisions taken by the Commission of Investigation - found to be contrary to the concept of pluralistic democracy as well as to the 1924 Constitution and the parliamentary rules of procedure - were amongst the justifications for the 1960 military coup.

This era of transition to a multi-party system failed to create a democratic and pluralistic press. The number of newspapers and magazines covering real opinions, arts and science decreased. On the other hand, imports were eased to meet the press' need for machines and paper. Automated typesetting and printing machines were purchased during this period.

This era also saw the establishment of the Journalism Institute, which formed the basis of today's Faculty of Communications at Istanbul University.

## Era of the Military Coup of May 27, 1960

On May 27, 1960, a group of 38 military officers, acting in the name of the Committee of National Unity (MBK) and led by the Commander of Land Forces Lieutenant-General Cemal Gürsel, staged a military coup and took over the government. The MBK received significant support not only from the opposition press but also from the newspapers that supported the Democratic Party until the coup d'état. The coup was portrayed as the beginning of a democratic era.

Promptly addressing the problems of the press as part of its agenda, the MBK repealed the anti-democratic articles in the laws and adopted regulations that gave journalists the right to proof.

The Press Advertisement Agency was established to prevent governments from using public notices and advertisements as means of repression. Amendments were made to Law No. 5953 in order to regulate the working conditions of journalists.

The Law No. 212, which took effect on 10 January 1961, introduced a requirement to draft written contracts with journalists. Improvements were made to the economic and social rights of journalists. 10 January was declared as "Working Journalists Day".

Newspaper owners reacted strongly to these amendments and decided not to publish newspapers for three days between June 11-13, 1961. This decision, taken by the bosses of nine newspapers (Akşam, Cumhuriyet, Dünya, Hürriyet, Milliyet, Tercüman, Vatan, Yeni İstanbul and Yeni Sabah), went down in press history as the "Nine Tycoons Incident".

Journalists who stood against this attitude decided not to let the public go without the news, and published a newspaper named "The Press" for three days under the leadership of the Istanbul Union of Journalists.

A year after improvements in support of the free press and the working conditions of journalists, the MBK government detained two journalists whose articles offended them. The detention of the Editorial Director of the daily Tanin and Aziz Nesin marked the resumption of the crackdown on journalists.

The first censorship mandates in this new era were conducted during the Yassıada Trials, where the executives of the Democrat Party were brought to trial. During these trials, which resulted in the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, Minister of Labor and Finance Hasan Polatkan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatin Rüştü Zorlu, a ban was imposed on publishing news reports other than those dictated by the Liaison Bureau of the Committee of National Unity.

*Journalists carry signs that read 'We insist on press freedom' in a demonstration organized by Izmir Journalists Association on June 21, 2022.*



## Turkish Press after the 1980s and the International Press Institute

### ► Ferai TINÇ

The 1980s represent a major milestone for the Turkish press. In fact, it is not possible to address the developments in Turkish media independently from the global picture which saw change in the world order in the run-up to the 80s.

The bipolar world order shaped by the absolute superiority of the USA was shaken by social and political events in the 1970s. The global and regional power of the USA was undermined by its defeat in the Vietnam War, the overthrow of its strong

ally Shah Reza Pahlavi in Iran and the rise of the Palestinian struggle.

The situation did not look promising for the Soviet Union either. The rising demand for independence, particularly in the "Eastern European States", and the strengthening of the anti-communist movement, aggravated the bones of contention between the two poles, resulting in heightened political tensions.

As an advanced police station in the southeast wing of NATO, it was not possible for Turkey to remain unaffected by these developments. By

the 1980s, Turkish society had been dragged into a deep divide. Universities became battlegrounds for right-wing and left-wing political movements, while labour movements and strikes spread across the country.

This political dynamism naturally had an impact on newspapers, which reinforced their positions as anti- or pro-government, adopting left-wing or right-wing ideological stances. In those days, popular columnists with well-known political stances attracted more attention than the news; columnists were the selling points of news-

papers. This era may be referred to as one where newspapers and journalism were perceived as a "social responsibility".

News from Ankara was the focal point of newspapers. Specialized pages, such as Economy News or Foreign News, either did not exist at all or occupied little space. Newspapers had sections on flowers or food recipes for women readers, and "social news" referred to scuffles, conflicts or cases of theft monitored via police radio.

The 1980s saw neoliberal economic policies introduced by governments in Turkey, and across the

world. Tight monetary policies implemented by President Ronald Reagan in the US and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the UK, followed by neo-liberal economic policies, had an impact on Turkey as well.

In 1980, certain steps were taken during the government of Süleyman Demirel, on the grounds of securing the accumulation of capital. The state became more inclined to ease its social responsibilities. This meant shrinking the financial support for labourers, and scaling down agricultural funds to villagers, for the sake of creating a free competitive market.

While the reductions in state support triggered social events, Turkey was shaken by a coup d'état on September 12, 1980. Political repressions intensified, and an era of fear and silence took hold. This era, which saw the closure of political parties and the detention of many people on both the right wing and the left, took its toll on the media as well.

According to press historian Alpay Kabalica, four dailies, titled Demokrat, Politika, Aydınlık and Hergün, were shuttered following the coup. Many other newspapers were suspended from publication for certain periods of time.

### Commercialization of the media

In previous years when the media, as the fourth estate, had a public function, it took on a role that had a responsibility to society and defended the interests of the state. The media began to cast aside these roles with the advent of a new era, where television gradually became a household item in addition to the newspaper.

Soft news gained

traction as a consequence of the repressions of the 1980 coup. Dailies published photos copied from the foreign press or ran stories based on foreign news, which were translated into Turkish and included protagonists with fabricated Turkish names or completely fictional stories.

Nevertheless, there was also a certain stream of dailies that properly ran soft news. The daily Hürriyet, a mainstream newspaper with the highest circulation at the time, had a foreign infotainment section led by Ahmet Örs, which produced quality soft news. The local infotainment section led by Orhan Olcay had the capacity to dive deep into the world of soft news thanks to its wide network. On the other hand, Hürriyet also commonly broadcast news covering the police.

### Newspaper ownership changes with the new era

The ownership of newspapers, which had been family businesses since the 1950s, also began to change in the 1980s.

In the aftermath of the assassination of Abdi İpekçi, the Editor-in-Chief of daily Milliyet, the newspaper's owner Ercüment Karacan no longer resisted pressure to sell the paper. Milliyet was sold to businessman Aydın Doğan in 1979.

Subsequently, Asil Nadir and Erol Aksoy sat at the bargaining table with Erol Simavi, the then-owner of daily Hürriyet, to buy the paper. Erol Aksoy gained 25 per cent ownership of Hürriyet.

Following the 1983 elections, the daily Hürriyet, with Çetin Emeç as its Editor-in-Chief, was competing with the daily Cumhuriyet in terms of gravitas, and ran the most

striking and fast-paced schedule of news stories in Turkey due to its wide news network. At the time, Hürriyet had a daily circulation of over 600 thousand.

Turgut Özal, who came to power after the 1980 coup, was aware of the power of Hürriyet and the press in general. His famous quote, "Having this many newspapers is too much for this country; two and a half newspapers are good enough," was an expression of his desire to control the press, and restrict the opposition.

In the face of government repression, Hürriyet partly managed to practice independent journalism, and did not yield to every whim of the ruling power.

When Özal imposed a 400 percent raise on the price of newsprint to punish newspaper owners, Erol Simavi penned the famous "Open letter to Özal" on April 19, 1988. In the letter published on the front page of Hürriyet, Simavi wrote that Turgut Özal had made an unwise decision due to the bypass surgery he had recently had in the USA, drawing parallels to similar cases of people he knew who had gone through the same procedure.

Özal was quick to respond to this challenge: He ceased communications with Simavi. Nevertheless, their falling-out did not last long. On 1 May 1988, the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Hürriyet, Özal and Simavi met and patched things up.

Although we do not know what exactly followed this reunion, there were some indications. In an interview with Emin Çölaşan on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the newspaper, Erol Simavi alleged that Süleyman Demirel, whose political

ban had recently been lifted and could emerge as a competitor for Özal, was a Freemason. Such information would undermine Demirel's prospects of returning as a stronger leader of the right wing than Özal, was the foundation of peace made between Özal and Simavi.

### Era of tycoon bosses

The first sign that heralded the era of tycoon bosses was the murder of Abdi İpekçi, the Editor-in-Chief of daily Milliyet and one of Turkey's most prominent journalists, on February 1, 1979.

In the 1990s, Turkey reeled from the murders of many journalists: Çetin Emeç, who resigned from his position as the editor-in-chief of Hürriyet but continued on as a writer, was assassinated in front of his house on March 7, 1990. On January 24, 1993, prominent investigative journalist Uğur Mumcu was also assassinated.

In Turkey, dark forces were attempting a form of social engineering.

Assassinated journalists were professionals loyal to press ethics and the values of the republic, respectful of the people's right to information and the news.

On December 11, 1991, during a commemoration ceremony held on the anniversary of Çetin Emeç's assassination, a bomb went off at Zincirlikuyu cemetery, at the graveside of Sedat Simavi, the founder of daily Hürriyet. Erol Simavi was unsettled by this bomb attack.

Simavi was already under immense pressure to sell the newspaper. Asil Nadir, a Cypriot businessman who became wealthy in the UK, and Robert Maxwell, a British media tycoon, were among the parties interested in buying. Ultimately, Erol Simavi sold Hürriyet to Aydın

Doğan in 1994.

Another major event that made a mark in the 1990s was the establishment of the daily Sabah.

Sabah was established with limited means by Dinç Bilgin, the owner of the daily Yeni Asır, a major local paper in Izmir province, and his close circle. The paper's first edition was published on April 22, 1985, and it came into prominence and assumed a leading position by 1992.

### The 1990s and the daily Sabah

Breaking ground in digitalization and new methods, Sabah increased its circulation by offering promotions rather than focusing on news stories.

This success quickly turned into a race of gift-giving amongst newspapers, upending all values in the press. The newspapers began to earn their income from the gifts they distributed to readers as opposed to providing credible and quality news reports.

By the end of 1992, papers were competing to hand out encyclopedias to readers, followed by the distribution of tableware. The daily Tercüman went as far as to pledge an aircraft.

Having reached unexpected levels of circulation thanks to promotional offers, newspaper managements, which were in pursuit of the largest share in the advertising pie, no longer cared about journalists.

The wars of promotional offers coincided with the years that saw the de facto end of the traditional Turkish press, commonly known as "Bâb-ı Âli" (or "Sublime Porte") journalism.

The then-Mayor of Istanbul Bedrettin Dalan decided to close the newspaper offices

which were traditionally located in central Cağaloğlu, and instead offered the papers cheap plots of land in Güneşli district, far from downtown Istanbul. The newspapers consequently built plazas on these plots of land, and moved their printing houses and headquarters there.

Plaza journalism detached journalists from everyday life. Most journalists started to commute to work by shuttles, while columnists and managers were driven to work in private vehicles.

Of course, this era had social consequences: Journalists became disengaged from the public but got closer to the ruling power and the busi-

ness world. Those who were closest snatched the most opportunities. Those who could not were dragged into a race to curry favour with newspaper managers. However, the newspapers still contained independent and impartial journalists who cared about their professions; and the polls showed that journalism was still among the occupations the public found credible.

### De-unionization

The daily Sabah started publication as a non-union business, which set Aydın Doğan, who had recently acquired daily Hürriyet, on

a path to de-unionize his newspapers and magazines on the grounds of "equal competition".

Aydın Doğan de-unionized his employees by threatening them: "You either resign from the trade union, or you will lose your job".

De-unionization not only undermined the rights of journalists, but it also led to certain arrangements in staff positions for the sake of tax deduction. Journalists were promised more money under the table in exchange for accepting



the minimum wage on their payrolls. They were told, "We will pay more to those who work more and less to those who work less". However, this promise was, of course, not kept.

Journalists were coerced into working on the same pay for years without getting any raises. They suffered the hardest blow when they retired because their pension was calculated based on payroll.

In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, well-educated young people, who could not complete their higher education due to their involvement in political movements, found jobs in newspapers and started to work as journalists, bringing quality to the press. However, by the end of the 1990s, the press had lost its appeal for educated young people.

These years saw the rise of monopolization and, in the case of the press, the prevalence of soft news on the pretext of "smiley face journalism". Sabah and Hürriyet dailies chalked their declining circulations up to the loss of interest in political news. Journalists who put themselves in the spotlight, and "tabloid" style journalism on trivial matters became all the rage. In the case of television, debate shows were gradually pushed to the background.

While the mainstream media was undergoing this crisis, a new actor came on the scene. The Fethullah Gülen movement, riding on the back of the daily Zaman, and its numerous magazines and products, played an effective role raising the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power and in the operations

conducted on the ground of "ending the tutelage of the military and the state bureaucracy of the Republic over the politics", which laid the groundwork for AKP's two decades in power. The prominence of Zaman came to a halt after the AKP and Gülenist alliance ended in 2013, and the movement was declared a terrorist organization.

### International Press Institute (IPI) and journalism trainings

Established in 1950 to protect the freedom of the press of the world's leading newspaper owners and managers, renowned columnists and writers, the International Press Institute has been active in Turkey since its establishment.

Prominent journalist Ahmet Emin Yalman was a co-founder of the IPI. Representatives from Turkey have, in every term, held a seat on its Board of Directors. Mainstream media bosses, including Erol Simavi, Ercüment Karacan, and in later years Aydın Doğan and Vuslat Doğan Sabancı were supportive of the International Press Institute, and some became members of its board of directors.

Writers of diverse opinions including Abdi İpekçi, Metin Toker, Hasan Yalçın, Sami Kohen, Zafer Atay and Nazlı Ilıcak championed free press under the umbrella of the International Press Institute.

The 1990s were a time of crisis for journalism for the above-mentioned reasons. Therefore, the IPI in those years focused on in-house media training, free courses to all journalists on a number of topics ranging from media credibility and accurate news reporting to the rights of journalists, the right of readers to get the news and solutions in response to the conflict between the

internet and traditional media. Trainers included seasoned journalists and writers from newspapers of diverse viewpoints and academics from different disciplines.

### AKP years in the media

After 2000, with AKP's rise to power, there has been a change in media ownership. Sabah daily fell under the control of a group close to the ruling power, and Doğan Media Group was pressured by the government to sell its media conglomerate to Demirören Holding in 2018. In this period, the repression of the press intensified, and Turkey became the second biggest jailor of journalists after Russia.

The repression targeted not only the written press and visual media, but also social media. On the one hand, people's freedom to access the news was blocked by the power of the government, and on the other hand, it was violated by disinformation and manipulations of the pro-government press created by the ruling power.

Similar to most press organizations, the International Press Institute focused on championing the freedom of the press after the 2000s.

A handful of non-pro-government newspapers with low circulations which have been trying to survive under harsh economic conditions were faced with heavy fines. Journalists were handed imprisonment sentences on unjust grounds, simply for being critical of the government.

The medium of television and social media shared the same fate. This was an era where heavy fines and imprisonment were used in an attempt to control the facts – especially in the years following

2010.

The censorship law drafted by AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) was an indication of efforts intended to commit the most severe rights violations in the history of the Turkish press. This law, titled the Anti-Disinformation Law, was a first step to kick-start a period of outright censorship.

Publicly disseminating misleading information was defined as a new offense. What this actually meant was this: Any opinion, expression and news report, whether via multimedia or print, as well as on the Internet and social media that diverged from the government's statements would be interpreted as "disrupting public peace" and punishable by an imprisonment sentence.

Despite an all-out opposition by the independent media, opposition parties and civil society organizations, the law was voted up by the ruling party, passed by the parliament and came into effect.

There have always been disagreements and bones of contention between governments and media outlets throughout the history of the press. Nevertheless, the destruction of journalism and the media has never been at the scale it has reached under the AKP-MHP coalition led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Still, the uplifting news is that, in this period, many young journalists have grown stronger in their struggles and kept journalism alive by providing accurate news to the public in any medium they can. It is worth noting that this goes hand in hand with the struggle for a strong unionization effort, which was lacking in previous periods.



*Journalists marched from Galatasaray Square to Taksim Square, demanding the release of arrested colleagues and better protection for press freedom, March 13, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey*

# Journalistic boundary work of the Justice and Development Party: Contracting boundaries of journalism

► **Gülden GÜRSOY-ATAMAN**

This article refers to the concept of “boundary work” to address how the AKP government has drawn the boundaries that have defined the state of media freedom since 2002. The concept of boundary work within journalism refers to various actors’ symbolic and material struggles to define legitimate journalism or legitimate journalists. The state is a major actor that attempts to delimit the boundaries of journalism. States do this by exercising a number of practices, including “censorship, distribution of subsidies, regulatory and legal frameworks, issuance of licenses and selective

access to state information”. This article focuses on the journalistic boundary work of the AKP, which has been in power since 2002, “governing the state apparatus,” and addresses the consequences of this boundary work.

Political parallelism and clientelism dominated the media system in Turkey before the AKP came to power. The state’s power over the media system has always been evident due to its roles as a regulatory body and funder. Despite numerous steps taken since 1946 to introduce high standards into the field of journalism, Turkey had a low level of professionalism in its media. Journalism in Turkey has limited autonomy on account

of government repression as well as market pressures. In addition, the practices of censorship and self-censorship constituted a major problem in the news media.

## The AKP Era

The AKP, which rose to power in 2002, followed a neoliberal and pro-EU policy in its early terms. When it clinched second and third-term election victories in 2007 and 2011, respectively, the AKP ensured that it both continued its hegemony and “reinforced the authoritarian neoliberal order”.

The AKP’s ensuing terms of power were marked by anti-Western and anti-globalization movements, mostly fed by nationalist

concerns, also comprising a backlash toward the policies adopted in its first term in power. In a similar vein, after 2007, the repercussions of distancing the country from Europe became more visible with respect to the freedom of the media.

## Having a strong media

Having a “strong” media that supports its continued grip on power has been of strategic importance for the AKP. The media is instrumental in consolidating its audience and repressing the opposition. Therefore, there has been an attempt to create a “loyal media bloc” through various methods.

The Savings Deposit



Insurance Fund (TMSF) was used as an instrument to create this loyal bloc, and select media organizations were granted “cheap loans via state banks”, “advertisements of state-owned institutions” and “public tenders”. Non-pro-government media were punished with tax penalties by the Ministry of Treasury and Finance.

This transformation might be summarized as follows: Since the second half of the 1990s, the press sector and the commercial publication sector have been dominated by a handful of companies. By the end of the 1990s, five media groups controlled 80 percent of the market: Doğan, Bilgin, Uzan, İhlas and Aksoy. As a result of the 2001 economic crisis and several financial irregularities, media companies owned by some holdings, including these groups, went under the control of the TMSF. A large number of media outlets were sold to holdings close to the AKP. For instance, Kanal 24 and Star Daily, belonging to the Uzan family, were sold to Sancak Holding. In 2007, the daily Sabah and ATV television channels, belonging respectively to Bilgin and Merkez groups were sold, by means of state bank loans, to Turkuvaz Media Group. This media group was owned by Çalık Holding, whose Chief Executive Officer was the son-in-law of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was prime minister at the time of the sale. On the other hand, Türk Media Group was confiscated by the TMSF for defaulting on its debt payments, and later sold its company to Sancak Holding in 2013. In 2017, some of the assets owned by media outlets that closed in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt were sold by the TMSF to Turkuvaz Media, “without an open tendering process”. By that time, Turkuvaz Media was owned by Kalyon

Group, which was close to Erdoğan and had won many public tenders.

Presently, in 2023, owners of media conglomerates in Turkey maintain close economic and political relationships with the ruling power; and companies owned by these businesspersons are the contractors of major public tenders. Under these circumstances, the quality of information produced and/or disseminated by these media organizations is adversely affected. For instance, some television stations refused to broadcast campaign films made for CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu’s presidential campaign. The CHP filed a criminal complaint against state-run broadcaster TRT on the grounds that TRT - which should be impartial as a public broadcaster - failed to respond to the CHP’s requests to have its campaigning film broadcast on three of its channels. These developments display the boundaries of information about the elections that may be circulated by the TRT or media organizations owned by businesspersons close to the government.

### Advertising

In addition to the transformation of the

structure of media ownership, the AKP has also used advertising as a tool to shape the field of journalism. The state became the “largest advertiser” owing to the official notices distributed by the Press Advertising Agency (BİK) and the advertisements of state-owned enterprises that were in possession of the Turkey Wealth Fund.

Under AKP rule, particularly after the transition to a presidential system, the benchmark for giving notices or ads is no longer the circulation of newspapers or the number of readers. The government has supported newspapers loyal to itself by means of these public notices and ads and punished those that were critical of the government. For instance, in 2020, the Press Advertising Agency had an advertising budget of around 182.5 million liras allocated for 30 nationally-circulating newspapers, and it placed 78 percent of its ads in pro-government newspapers.

In recent years, newspapers critical of the government have been issued penalties cutting off official notices and ads. In 2020, over 95 percent of penalties were handed out to Cumhuriyet, Evrensel, BirGün,

Sözcü and Korkusuz dailies on the grounds of violating the Press Code of Ethics. Since 18 September 2019, no official notices or ads were allowed in Evrensel daily, whose right to run official notices and advertisements was ultimately revoked in August 2023.

In March 2023, the Constitutional Court delivered a pilot judgment concerning the penalties against Cumhuriyet, Evrensel, BirGün and Sözcü in which the Court ruled that the Press Advertising Agency had acted in violation of the freedom of expression and the press. Concurrently, the Court pointed out that “the power granted to the Press Advertising Agency went beyond the purpose of regulating the ethical values of the press but turned into a tool of punishment, which might be deterring for some members of the press, causing a systematic problem”.

After 2013, the government, in addition to official notices and ads, directed its attention to commercial advertisers and imposed strong pressures on advertisers, influencing their decisions about which medium to place their ads in. Media planning and advertising agencies owned by persons close to the government ensured that influential advertisers were directed toward certain media organizations while also avoiding opposition media. For instance, the daily Karar stated that it “faced a severe embargo from the outset of its publication” and “not only... public institutions but also all private sector companies were openly prevented from placing notices in the newspaper”.

### Social media

As the AKP increased its control over traditional media, social media has gained more importance for citizens as a “communication and political tool”.



*Sabah and ATV, which were confiscated in 2007 by the TMSF, was handed to Çalık Group in 2008. Berat Albayrak, the son-in-law of the then-Prime Minister Erdoğan, was at the time the Group’s CEO.*

Especially after the 2010s, the AKP's repressive policies caused various groups to distance themselves from the party, and many groups challenged the AKP hegemony during the Gezi protests. These groups used social media to "share the news, information and their critical opinions" and to organize. Information about the events unfolding between December 17-25, 2013 was shared via platforms such as Youtube and Twitter.

Consequently, the government began to see the online public space as a major threat and adopted various methods to control it, including introducing legal regulations, blocking access to social media platforms, content removal, launching investigations into users, placing users under custody and detention as well as bandwidth throttling. For instance, fed by the fears caused by the unknown aspect of the Internet and claiming to protect users from illegal and harmful content, the Law no 5651 on "Regulating Internet Publications and Combating Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications" was introduced, regulating the internet for the first time in 2007. Afterwards, for almost every political and social development that posed a risk to the hegemony of the government, this law was amended to ramp up the control of both the state and non-state actors online. Moreover, online content that fell outside the scope of the law was criminalized in other legislation, including the Turkish Penal Code and the Anti-Terrorism Law. In October 2023, the adoption of new law amendments, known as the "censorship law", caused grave concerns about the "free" flow of information during the 2023 Presidential and Parliamentary election processes and the right of citizens to information.

Turkey ranks fourth out of the five countries that



*Protestors calling for Freedom of the Press outside the Istanbul Court Building, Turkey December 2011, Istanbul.*

have made 97 percent of content removal requests to Twitter since 2018, which is a clear indication of how strongly the AKP wants to control online content. Between mid-2019 and the end of 2021, Twitter complied with close to half of Turkey's content takedown requests. This data points to the key role social media platforms play in limiting freedom of expression. A serious consequence is the decline in the diversity of content accessible to citizens.

In addition to the above, the AKP created "an army of trolls" after the Gezi Park protests. These social media accounts engendered the spread of disinformation and polarization, feeding cancel culture and the climate of censorship. They also attacked dissident or critical journalists, artists and academics with the aim of discrediting and silencing them. Online troll activity causes increased self-censorship and a decline in citizen participation in public debates, adversely affecting freedom of expression.

### **Freedom of press and jailed journalists**

Freedoms of expression and the press are safeguarded under articles 26 and 28 of the Constitution of 1982. These freedoms are guaranteed by international con-

ventions to which Turkey is a party. Nevertheless, the data from international journalism organizations show that the



freedoms of the media and journalists were severely restricted between 2002 and 2022.

In the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI), Turkey ranked 100th in 2002. By 2022, it had dropped to the 149th place. According to data by BIA Media Monitoring Reports, between 2001 and 2021 the freedom of expression of media organizations and journalists was violated and restricted on the grounds of "insult", "inciting public to hatred and animosity", and "degrading the Turkish nation, the state or the state organs" and "insulting the President".

The government targeted different groups of journalists, depending on the changing power balance and the perception of threats. The data by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) points to a significant

increase in the number of jailed journalists in Turkey since 2009. In the year 2016, when the coup attempt took place, this figure reached its highest point in recent years. According to IPI's October-November 2023 data, 19 journalists were in jail. In these two months alone, 34 journalist trials were held.

The increase in the number of jailed journalists is related to the regime's tendency toward authoritarianism, and points to the perception of certain types of journalism as a "form of opposition that needs to be reined in". Yet, the government tried to cover up the violations of the freedom of expression by claiming that journalists were not detained because of their journalistic

activities, and by questioning the reports of institutions that record the violations of press freedom and the number of jailed journalists.

As outlined in the first section of this report, structural and legal problems in the field of journalism that defines the boundaries of freedom of expression go back before AKP rule. Nonetheless, AKP's increasingly authoritarian regime, particularly after the transition to the presidential system, has exacerbated the existing problems and introduced new ones.

The AKP government contracts the boundaries of both the field of journalism and of freedom of expression by exercising control over traditional media as well as new media. It is becoming very difficult for critical and independent news agencies and journalists to practice journalism.



Journalists marched to the governor's office in Istanbul Cagaloglu on May 3, World Press Freedom Day, demanding press freedom and justice.

# UNPUNISHED OFFENDERS, INNOCENT CONVICTS

## ► Rengin ARSLAN

As we mark the centennial of the founding of the Republic of Turkey, we are faced with the fact that while assaults and murders against journalists go unpunished, journalists are quickly punished for an article or a social media post. In the Turkish legal system, the legal processes that do not function for the perpetrators of attacks against journalists and press workers are suddenly expedited when it comes to ordering journalists to stand as defendants.

One does not need to go too far: On September 21, 2022, the lawsuit in response to the 1992

assassination of journalist Musa Anter, a writer for the daily *Özgür Gündem* in Diyarbakır, was dismissed because the statute of limitations had expired. The date of the hearing set by the Court was a day after the expiry date. Making a loud and clear statement of the calculated move to have the court case dismissed.

Moreover, the investigation into the murder of Musa Anter, also known as Ape Musa (in Kurdish, Uncle Musa), was put on hold for two decades without any action being taken to catch the perpetrators. In 2012, the start of a "Peace Process" between the Turkish government and the PKK led to a step being

taken to prosecute the perpetrators.

With the end of the Peace Process in 2015, this step was shelved yet again, and as of 2023, the struggle to identify the perpetrators continues with an application made to the Constitutional Court.

An investigation into the murder of Musa Anter was launched four years after his assassination. The court did not listen to the testimony of Abdülkadir Aygan, who was allegedly a witness to the murder. Nor did it heed the demands made by the attorneys of the plaintiff. Notwithstanding, the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against

Turkey, the Susurluk Report, the statements of PKK defector Abdülkadir Aygan, and former National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) Head of Counter Terrorism, the investigation into the murder, committed 30 years ago, could not proceed. All in all, the three-decade long process, spanning from the launching of an investigation to the drafting of an indictment and taking witness testimonies, took place in full view of the public as if it were some sort of documentary about impunity.

After the lawsuit was dismissed due to the expiry of the prescriptive period, Dicle Anter, the son of Musa Anter, perhaps

gave the best description of how this atmosphere of impunity affects persons who lost their loved ones when he said, "Today, they killed my father all over again."

The 1990s were Turkey's bloodiest years in terms of the assassination of journalists. 37 out of 57 journalists murdered since the founding of the Republic of Turkey were fatally attacked in the 1990s.

In my interview with İsmet Sezgin, the then-Minister of Interior, for the BBC Türkçe article series '90'larda ne olmuştu?' (What happened in the 1990s), he said, "There were incidents before 1994. There were some deaths, killings and imprisonment sentences. There was a sort of struggle. As it is referred to today, some

of our citizens were murdered. We were waging a struggle. And different methods were used in that struggle".

Sezgin stated that non-state powers and groups were used in this struggle, adding that they knew who committed the assassination from the "method of killing". When I asked him if he was referring to Hizbullah, he replied:

"We took a look at how they killed someone. It was similar to today's HÜDA-PAR (Free Cause Party). The State turned a blind eye. The State did so in part due to its obligations of being a state, and because the public was in extreme distress about this, and it wanted it to be eliminated. This was done in good faith."

One of the assassinated

journalists was Halit Güngen, who reported a news story on the allegations that Hizbullah members, whom the State was said to turn a blind eye toward, were trained at riot police centers.

Güngen, who worked as Diyarbakır bureau chief of 2000'e Doğru magazine, was killed two days after he reported this news. He was 21 years old.

The killing of Güngen was referred to as "a murder by unknown assailants" for as long as eight years. In 2000, Güngen's murder was included in the Hizbullah Main Court Case in addition to 188 murder cases considered by the Diyarbakır 6th High Penal Court. Fuat Balca, Abdülkerim Kaya, Cemal Tutar and M. Faysal Bozkuş were among the

persons of interest in the murder case. Bozkuş was released in 2007.

In 2009, the Court sentenced Bozkuş to 14 years in prison. 16 defendants, including Balca, Kaya and Tutar, were given life sentences. However, before the final judgment was delivered on the court case, 12 defendants were released on 3 January 2023 on the ground that their jail term exceeded 10 years under the Code of Criminal Procedure, which had taken effect on 1 January 2011. Balca, Kaya and Tutar were among the released defendants.

On 14 January 2011, 11 days after their release, the 9th Criminal Chamber of the Court of Cassation decided to detain the defendants once again, whom it had released on

Protestors demand justice for Hrant Dink. December 2011.



precautionary terms. Two weeks later, on 26 January, the Court of Cassation upheld the life sentences for 16 defendants and the 14-year imprisonment sentence for Bozkuş. However, none of the released defendants could be found.

Although the 1990s were the bloodiest years in terms of attacks and assassinations against journalists in Turkey, murders and impunity have also marked every period in the history of the country without ever skipping a decade.

In addition to the high-profile court cases of Abdi İpekçi, Uğur Mumcu, Hrant Dink and Metin Göktepe, the assassinations of Recai Ünal of the daily *Demokrat* and İzzet Keser of the daily *Sabah* were also added to the hall of shame listing Turkey's unsolved murders by unknown assailants.

As the 1990s in Turkey are associated with murders by unknown assailants and impunity, the 2010s and the ensuing years have been, and continue to be, associated with punishments meted out to journalists by the courts.

### Innocent convicts

In early 2023, a report presented by Sezgin Tanrikuş, a Member of Parliament on the ticket of the main opposition CHP, reveals that at least 848 journalists were detained in the 12 months at the beginning and end of 2022. Again, in January 2023, according to data shared by CHP Deputy Utku Çakırözer, the number of times journalists stood trial before a judge was 505, and the number of journalists placed under detention was 30.

After 2010, the court cases publicly dubbed as the Ergenekon Trial, Sledgehammer (Balyoz) Trial and KCK (Kurdistan

Communities Union) Trial led to the imprisonment of more than 100 journalists in prisons across Turkey. The coup attempt in 2016 also resulted in the detention of journalists, and the closing of dozens of media organs.

While mass detentions came on top of the public agenda during the breaking points of Turkey's political history, sentences given to journalists and suspended execution of sentences were mostly met with silence. Lawsuits brought to court for charges of insulting the President or spouting propaganda of a terrorist organization and being a member of a terrorist organization under the Anti-Terrorism Law have almost become mundane over the last two decades.

According to the Media Monitoring Database of Reporters Without Borders (RSF), journalists faced judicial intervention 1794 times in the last 25 years. While some of these interventions were actions for damages, some involved custody, detention and lengthy prosecutions. The same database reveals that 35 physical assaults against journalists and press outlets were awarded with impunity.

Journalists who are taken into custody while they follow demonstrations or who are punished for their news reports or social media posts have become common occurrences. However, the most striking incident was the legal proceedings launched against journalist Hayri Demir for "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" on account of a post on his Facebook account, where he shared a newspaper notice published to commemorate the journalists killed in the 1990s.

The indictment drafted by the Diyarbakır Office of the Public Prosecutor pre-

sented Demir's five social media posts as evidence for the charges. In 2018, the court sentenced Demir to 1 year, 6 months and 22 days in prison, and deferred the announcement of the verdict.

### Attacks against journalists

Although there is an outcry from a certain segment of the society in response to physical attacks against journalists, impunity still continues to be the one constant in this saga.

In 2013, hundreds of thousands of people across Turkey participated in the Gezi Park protests, a milestone where journalists were both singled out as targets and also faced police brutality. Nevertheless, physical attacks against journalists neither began in 2013 nor ended afterwards.

Erol Önderoğlu, the Turkey Representative of Reporters Without Borders, notes that it took nearly two years to issue an indictment about the culprits who attacked Yavuz Selim Demirağ, a columnist at the daily *Yeniçağ* on May 10, 2019.

In response to a similar incident, Önderoğlu says, "The decision of non-prosecution for the assaults against 10 journalists, who wanted to report the news about the attack on June 8, 2016 against the Midyat Police Directorate, is a sad symbol of impunity".

According to data provided by CHP Deputy Utku Çakırözer, 18 journalists were attacked, and more than 100 journalists experienced police brutality during public demonstrations in 2022.

One of the most striking incidents in terms of impunity in Turkey took place in 2022. The court, which heard the trial of 25 persons who attacked Halk TV programmer Levent Gültekin with batons,

decided to commute the sentence "on account of the social relations" of the defendants. Defendants who were sentenced to 11 months in prison did not even serve one day behind bars.

All of these incidents not only obstruct justice, but also play a role in encouraging future attacks - particularly in an environment where non-pro-government journalists are often targeted by politicians.

In an ever-changing media environment, social media has become yet another tool for orchestrating attacks against journalists. The level of threats against journalists is increasing, not to mention that the lines between criticism and insults are getting blurrier.

A recent example of this is the experience of Timur Soykan, who reported the story of H.K.G., who was allegedly forced to marry at the age of six, at the daily *Birgün*.

The allegation was that this child was the daughter of Yusuf Ziya Gümüşel, founder of the Hiranur Foundation affiliated with the İsmailağa Congregation. Soykan received numerous death threats because of this news story, including from supporters of other congregations.

Ultimately, legal proceedings were launched into the allegations he brought to light. However, impunity continues for those who threatened a journalist for breaking a news story.

The assassinations of, and physical attacks against journalists that we have witnessed over the past century have shape shifted over the past decade. The changes in their form and method, coupled with the response the governments give - or refrain from giving - may give us a clue about what may be in store for the coming years.



# Are we journalists or activists?

## ► Ruşen ÇAKIR

On March 3, 2023, İYİ Party Leader Meral Akşener announced their departure from the Table of Six, asserting that Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu was imposing his candidacy. Following this divisive decision, numerous media outlets, described as “dissidents”, waged a smear campaign against Akşener and the İYİ party. Three days later, the parties somehow patched things up and moved on. However, it was not that easy for the media outlets and journalists in question to move on as if nothing had happened: They had kept their doors wide open for Akşener and İYİ Party until March 3, only to slam them loudly in their faces, which led to a severe loss of trust.

The problem here

arises from a number of reasons, including the wrongly established relationship between the journalist (or the media outlet) and the politician; the intentional lack of distance between the journalist and politician, and the absolute engagement of the journalist in a political goal or cause.

We have become used to this. For instance, some journalists and media outlets may easily accept being described as “pro-government” or “dissident” without much objection; they may even brag about it. Journalists who have no qualms about expressing themselves as “dissidents” explain their attitudes by attributing this to the authoritarian regime and the consequent escalation of polarization in the country.

This stance is assumed as part of a resistance to the authoritarian regime’s approach to governing the country by escalating polarization. Nevertheless, it, in fact, produces the opposite result. Dividing the media into “pro-government” or “dissident” advance the idea that the polarization is absolute. Accordingly, the struggle against authoritarianism is reduced to strengthening “dissident” media and like-minded circles and putting the other media in a difficult position.

If a media outlet does not want to be a part of an authoritarian regime, then it first has to step away from the boundaries that the regime is trying to draw. The prerequisite to achieving this is not to accept polarization as an absolute fact,

but to try to help eliminate it altogether.

I define this as “trans-polar journalism”. Journalists that limit themselves to a particular circle, and report only stories and commentaries that appeal to that circle are merely making “opposition propaganda to opposition groups”. They are recreating a polarized social structure based on harsh conflicts.

Polarization and the accompanying political tensions and conflicts are a reality in Turkey which a journalist cannot ignore. However, journalists should address these facts objectively, critically and from a distance. They should not feel obliged to be a part of these facts. Rather, they should purposefully steer clear of them.

# JOURNALISM AGAINST ALL ODDS!

In Turkey, the majority of the mainstream media has been captured; still, the real journalists insist upon “objective journalism”

## ► İpek YEZDANI

Checks and balances acting independent of the ruling power are a sine qua non of democracies. In many countries, a free and independent media is a principal part of the democratic checks and balances. The relative freedom and independence of the media, is a reliable barometer of the status of democracy in a country.

So how is public opinion formed? German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' notion of “public sphere” is a space

for free discussion where individuals who leave their private space can join in a discussion as equal citizens and talk about any social, cultural and political topics. From public spheres has emerged the concept of “public opinion” today.

It is the media's duty to build public opinion, as well as questioning political power and holding it to account. In other words, journalism is a job that serves the public interest. For journalism to be able to serve the public interest, it first must be free and independent.

When we take a look at the mainstream media in Turkey we see that more than 90 per cent of it is under the control of the ruling power or their business associates. According to “The State of State Media”, a report by the London-based Media and Journalism Research Center, all of Turkey's mainstream media groups are under the control of the ruling power.

The report, written by Marius Dragomir and Astrid Söderström, defines the media groups of Demirören, Albayrak, Turkuvaz, Türk, Hayat

Görsel, Ciner, İhlas and Doğuş as “captured private media”. Once these private media organizations were “captured”, there was no longer any “need”, so to speak, for qualified and independent journalists.

The mainstream media have since largely turned become a press office or “a propaganda tool” for the government. It no longer engaged in any news reporting activity that might disturb the government. Consequently, there was no longer a concern for objective and balanced news reporting, while



Journalists carry signs that read ‘We insist on press freedom’ and ‘We insist on truth’ in a demonstration organized by the Izmir Journalists Association on June 21, 2022.

concepts like ethical journalism soon became "a thing of the past".

Under the AKP government, too many qualified journalists, who have for so long reported high-profile news stories that made the headlines, were left outside the media ecosystem - not for doing a poor job but for doing a good job. "Doing a good job" referred to having a sense of objective, balanced and fair journalism; it did not mean "being partial". Some of these journalists who distanced themselves, or were distanced from the previous mainstream media, became unemployed; some found low-paying jobs at independent media organizations.

So, in today's Turkey, "can journalism be conducted against all odds" at independent organizations? Senior Journalist İpek Özbey, coordinator of news programs at Halk TV, with many years of work experience at mainstream media organizations, including for the dailies Milliyet and Hürriyet, gives the below response:

"Of course, it can be done. We throw spanners in the works of the broken system with our news reports on corruption, child rapes, harassment of women, femicides, as well as economic, political and social issues in Turkey. Despite the repression of the RTÜK (Turkish broadcast regulator Radio and Television Supreme Council), and the risk of a screen blackout imposed on us, it is as if everyone working in this organization, from the boss to the journalists, has taken an oath not to be silenced. The fines are unbelievably high. We are constantly dealing with court cases, constantly being

threatened, there are even some people who issue death warrants against us on social media. And yes, to answer your question, journalism can be conducted against all odds."

Barınç Yinanç, another senior journalist who writes for T24, an independent news website, after quitting her job at Hürriyet Daily News, where she worked for many years as a writer and an editor, said the following:

"Journalism is surely conducted in the independent media against all odds because, above all, you are free of the self-censorship mechanism that hijacked the mainstream media. You also have no obligation to ignore certain stories and move forward with others in line with 'instructions from certain places'. Of course, limited economic means have an adverse effect on the quality of the news reports. The master-apprentice relationship does not function very well. News reporting 'in the field' remains limited due to both political and economic obstacles. Although it is a challenge to access the type of information that the government would not like, I find it is imperative to at least have the freedom to enjoy the right to criticize".

Nevertheless, it is important to recall that news reporting is also a commercial activity. At the end of the day, journalism is a profession.

Media owners and journalists first need a proper income, and financial sustainability to report objective, balanced, accurate and independent news. So, how will independent media organizations try to fend for them-

selves, so to speak, survive in countries like Turkey, where more than 90 percent of the mainstream media is under the control of the government or their affiliated business community?

Below is İpek Özbey's reply to this question:

"First of all, the pressure of fines should be lifted because the earnings from advertisements and even bigger amounts are spent to pay fines. It would be a good step in the right direction if they stopped penalizing journalism. When everything becomes normal, the advertising pie will be fairly distributed. Subscriptions still give the print media breathing space.

Still, I have seen over the years that readers and the audience in Turkey do not want to pay for journalism services. They only rush for help when journalism is victimized. They stand by for any type of support, in-kind or in cash, for the channel they watched with their families growing up. I think readers and the audience should seek good content. They should stand by quality news reporting as much as they do when the freedom of press is at stake. After all, this support is a necessity for the reader-audience. That is of course, if they care for the public 'good'."

Barınç Yinanç said, "In the past, when there was no Internet, every household used to at least buy a newspaper in addition to a loaf of bread. In other words, a certain budget used to be set aside for 'the news', for getting information. We must raise and spread the awareness that we should pay for the news just as we pay for clothing or concerts; that access to news is

as important as bread and water. Regrettably, awareness of this is not strong enough.

One handicap of the independent media in Turkey is that it covers a very wide range of mediums of varying sizes, from media outlets that have newsrooms with 20-25 person teams to news reporters who are 'jack-of-all-trades' conducting solo journalism. The existence of a high number of media outlets inevitably induces competition for economic sustainability. Having independent journalists under larger umbrella organizations seems like a preferable idea in terms of economic sustainability, albeit difficult to put into practice for the time being".

"The New Mainstream is Rising", a report written by the IPI's Turkish National Committee President Emre Kızılkaya and journalist Burak Utücü, also presents findings indicating that real journalists in Turkey continue to conduct journalism "against all odds".

The report, dated 2021, states that digital access to independent media in Turkey (33.5 million users per month) has reached a volume comparable to that of pro-government media (47.8 million users).

The report explains that "It is not correct to refer to today's independent media outlets as trying to hold on to journalism against all odds, as "the alternative media". It would be more accurate to define them as the core of a new 'mainstream' media."

In short, journalists in Turkey continue to conduct quality journalism "against all odds", performing miracles despite the challenges and the repression.



Within the scope of International Women's Day, feminist night march was organized to protest violence against women and defend women's rights. Turkey Istanbul Beyoglu March 8, 2021.



# WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN TURKEY

► Prof. Dr. Yasemin  
GİRİTLİ İNCEOĞLU

In the history of the Turkish press, women evidently could not gain their deserved place in the face of exclusionary practices of male-dominant hegemony at the corporate level.

Seemingly corroborating this opinion, Türkan Türker, in her book "Bir Kadın Gazeteci" ("A Woman Journalist"), writes:

"Everywhere in the world, women's aspirations to conduct journalism are seen as odd, even unseemly. Journalism is a profession dominated by men. Because it may require working at all hours of the day. It is a rough and competitive working environment. A



*The cover of 'Kadınlar Dünyası' (Women's World) magazine published from 1913 to 1921.*

young woman who asserts that she is going to be a journalist will first have to convince her family, her close circle, or is sometimes even forced to cast them aside in this culture, a culture which empha-

sizes, on every occasion, that women's main duty is motherhood and keeping the family together, and which recommends that, if women must work, they had better engage in professions that have regular work hours such as teaching or secretarial work or become nurses or caregivers, jobs that require compassion and involve care work."

Despite this disregard for women, she still encourages them to pursue journalism, adding: "I heartily recommend a career in journalism to all young girls who would like to become journalists as long as they take the risk of facing "struggle, gossip and slander".

Women in the Turkish press, who can be de-

scribed as our first women journalists, have a most important characteristic in common: They began by writing about women's rights. These publications highlighted the idea that women, raising the new generation, had to get an education; consequently, the first women journalists addressed, inter alia, child education, women's decency, health, fine arts, polygyny, and the prevention of women from studying. These coverage of women's rights helped strengthen women's rights and gain ground with women in the West.

The daily Terakki, which started its publication in 1867 during the Tanzimat (Reorganization) Era, ran articles on equality between men and women,

the education of women and granting women the right to work, including stories critical of polygyny. Marking a first, the daily published letters by women and published a new weekly magazine titled *Terakki-i Muhadderat* (Progress of Covered Women). It tried to promote women's rights on the one hand and drew attention to women's movements in the Western world on the other. It was again in this era that women started to work in the Turkish press for the first time.

Selim Nüzhet Gerçek, in his book *Türk Gazeteciliği* (Turkish Journalism), includes two pieces of writings from this first women's newspaper: One is a letter by a reader that says, "my husband tells me that men also read this weekly and say, 'our beloved wives shall reach the level of decency we want, and we shall be proud of them.'" The other piece includes expressions: "... girls hereafter will graduate from school and be well-read; and, unlike the women in the past, they will no longer pay regard to any shenanigans, including the mischiefs of hodjas..."

Selma Rıza, the first woman journalist in the history of our press, was among the dissenting group against the Abdülhamid administration. Addressing the women's issue from the perspective of gender roles, Selma Rıza wrote in *Meşveret* and *Şûrâ-yı Ümmet* dailies, the media outlets of the Young Turks, penning articles which supported the women's struggle in the public sphere and criticised polygamy and arranged marriages. She worked as a manager at the Turkish Red Crescent, which was then called *Hilal-i Ahmer*. Furthermore, she wrote articles on women's rights in the magazines *Hanım-*



*Sabiha Sertel, one of the Republic's first professional female journalists.*

lara *Mahsus Gazete* and *Kadınlar Dünyası*.

Following the special women's editions published by dailies, the first women's newspaper was *Şükufeza*. The paper, whose writers were all women, stated the following in its first edition in 1885: "Since we have been the butt of men's jokes calling us 'a lot of hair but little brain' with mocking laughter, we will try to prove them wrong."

*Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, the first and the longest-running women's magazine in Ottoman society, emphasized that women should not be segregated from men,

stressing the importance for society of educating women who will raise the next generations.

In her book *Kadın Gazeteciler* (Women Journalists), Ayşe Asker describes the characteristics of women journalists during the eras of Tanzimat, the Constitutional Monarchy and the Republic:

"The first women journalists were of wealthy and prominent families, whereas women journalists today are mainly of the middle class.

The first women journalists received private educations, whereas those of today have enjoyed equal education opportunities

provided in the Republic Era. Most are alumni of the Press and Publications College (today's Faculty of Communications).

The first women journalists started in journalism by writing articles on women's rights. Today, women journalists mostly joined the profession in the 1980s. The social, economic development of the country as well as the journalism education available to women, played a role in this. Their interest in women's rights does not go beyond their personal efforts.

For the first women journalists, journalism was a tool to make their voices heard, whereas today, it is a profession."

### Republican Era

Most women journalists in the Republic's first years worked in newspapers and magazines where their husbands had an active role. Among them were Sabiha Sertel, Rezzan Yalman and Advıye Fenik. Another common characteristic of the women journalists of this era was that, until the end of the Second World War, they settled for only being columnists.

Halide Edib, a renowned writer of the Republican Era, also known for fighting on the frontlines of the Turkish War of Independence, came to prominence as a woman writer and a journalist. She wrote in several dailies, including *Vakit*, *Akşam*, *İkdam*, *Son Telgraf*, *Tan* and *Yedigün*, and drew attention with her writings during and after the *Mütareke* (Negotiation) Period.

Unlike the women of the Ottoman Era, who struggled for their social identity, women of the Republican Era battled to gain certain rights and improve their physical visibility, while also writing articles in several magazines.

This era saw magazines covering various topics, including fashion, beauty, women's sexuality, health, entertainment, astrology, popular culture, food and the equality between men and women. Furthermore, some magazines did not merely capitalize on women's bodies or desires but embraced the feminist movement.

With the proclamation of the Republic, magazines started to discuss women's rights and feminism openly, and, in a turnaround of women's images of the Ottoman era, promoted the image of an ideal Republican woman, covering women's images that aimed to gain rights and freedoms equal to those that men enjoyed.

The opening of journalism schools, particularly after the 1950s, has facilitated women's entry into the sector; the number of women journalists has risen after the 1980s. As newspapers turned into a mass medium, professional expertise has developed, which has been influential in the rise of the number of women journalists.

This era may be considered as a period where women, who acquired expertise in their professions and pursued news stories in male-dominated areas such as the courthouse or the parliament, have "faced and, in due course, overcame the challenges of being a woman", challenges concerning both the workplace and news sources.

In 1952, Vasfiye Özkoçak, who would become Turkey's first woman courthouse correspondent, was asked by Burhan Felek, her professor at the university, to work at the daily Cumhuriyet. Below is her account of her experience:

"Male colleagues at the newspaper were at first

surprised. They reportedly said to each other, 'What is a young girl doing among men? She should go back home'. Some allegedly said I could not stand more than a few days and would give up; others said that I must be trying to find a husband and would leave once I found one. Despite what they thought, I never found the time to get married. I embraced the fact that journalism was my life.

In the early days of my profession, they told me, for instance, "The National Education has a meeting; you will go there to cover it". I went to the address given to me. There was a group of all men, and none looked like an educator! It turned out that it was not a Congress of National Education but a congress of porters. They would not let me in! I introduced myself and told them, 'I am a journalist with Cumhuriyet daily; I came

here to attend and cover your congress". I went inside saying that I have a job to do. But there was a scuffle in the meeting hall! Large men beating each other! I was caught in the middle. I wrote the news report with great difficulty; pictures were taken, and my job was done. I told the newspaper that I had completed my report and was returning. They told me, 'Do not come yet; stay till the end'. When I went back to the newspaper office that evening, my whole body was red and swollen. I broke out in a rash. It was only much later that I found out that they sent me there on purpose and knew that scuffles always broke out at the congress of porters. I found out about this only five years ago from a friend speaking at a meeting that, at the time, several people, including Feyyaz Toker, said, "Whatever we did, we could not make her quit".

I worked too hard so male friends would not have a reason to say, "She is a woman, so she could not make it'."

### After the 1980s

The emergence of depoliticization after the 1980s and the neo-liberal trends influencing Turkey under the 1983 Özal government greatly impacted the transformation of journalism and opinion columns - an era described as that of 'the polished image' in the words of the writer Can Kozanoğlu.

Shying away from political news and opting instead for sensational news was a rising trend with the central features of the era being the pursuit of optimum self-interest, profiting, opportunism, fame and a culture of hedonism. In reflection, the archetype of a hedonist, egocentric and opportunistic journalist prevailed. The most significant disadvantage of this archetype was that they lacked cultural capital.

Columnists who strived to become the news themselves, and who constantly talked about their own lives, were all the craze. Visually appealing news became a hit; we turned into a performance society. Besides, the tendency to perceive public opinion as a news market and a passive spectator, disrespecting certain values among readers reached disturbing levels. Meanwhile, "new journalists", veering away from the "traditional approach to journalism", which they called "outdated", attempted to educate the society about sophisticated tastes and pleasure-seeking.

While men dominated the coverage of the economy, politics and sports news, women were left to cover stories related to culture and the arts. Singers, models and actors



*Halide Edip, a journalist and novelist who also played a critical role in Turkey's War of Independence.*

attempted to become journalists.

Simultaneously, with the development of women's rights in the 1980s, most women journalists started covering women's issues, mostly on women's pages and newspaper supplements. Journalism became a profession for women in this era. Magazine publishing, which developed after the 1980s, also facilitated women journalists' entrance to the sector.

Nevertheless, despite the rise in the number of women journalists after the 1980s, their influence did not increase as much, as explained by women journalists themselves. Although there are no visible barriers to women taking managerial positions at newspapers, there are invisible barriers that prevent women from climbing up the higher echelons of management.

The book *Gazetecilik 24 Saat* contains interviews with women journalists, revealing the problems they face in the press sector. Women journalists have the same qualifications as their male colleagues; but still, there are only a few women journalists in management. Although they do the same job, women get paid less and are taken less seriously.

According to a survey of a hundred women journalists by the Women Journalists Commission of the Turkish Journalists Association, women journalists complain most about their difficulties in achieving their career goals. Other topics of complaint are sexism, unequal pay, mobbing, and family and social identity, respectively.

Women journalists are often pushed out of the sector against their own choice. Surveys show that, compared to other sectors, the main difference of being a manager at a newspaper is that man-

agers are continuously required to work longer hours, can take only one day off per week, and can take rotational leave on holidays. In short, women in managerial positions in the press always have to make sacrifices one way or another.

Ultimately, women's posts make up the lower tier, where fewer men are employed. Moreover, compared to men, it is more difficult and takes longer for women to rise to decision-making positions (especially if they are married with children).

Nurcan Akad, who had to struggle against male colleagues both in her capacity as the editorial di-

rector of the daily *Hürriyet*, and as editor-in-chief of the daily *Akşam*, corroborates the results of the survey:

"Turkish media is a space where the equality of women and men is violated, and discrimination is made on the grounds of sex. It took as late as the 21st century for a woman to become an editor-in-chief in Turkey. The media sees women - regardless of them being journalists or the subject of the news story - from a male-dominant perspective, and it cannot tolerate women over the age of 40.

Women journalists who may rise to managerial positions are dismissed on the pretext of a crisis.

Instead, their colleagues who pursue trivial news stories are encouraged, brought to the fore, and figuratively displayed as window dressing. Over the years, newspapers terminated the pages where women journalists effectively covered specific news stories (health, pop culture, culture and art etc.). The problem of the male-dominance of the media will be resolved when more women participate in decision-making processes."

The latest report by the Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ) states that, between the beginning of 2021 and October 2022, most journalists working in the field in Turkey experienced verbal violence by the police. Some 44 women journalists were subjected to police brutality. The police raided the homes of three women journalists and took them into custody, and 13 women journalists were taken into custody while they were reporting the news in the field.

Although frequently subjected to sex-based discrimination and gender inequality because of the perennial hegemonic masculinity in the Turkish media, women journalists continue their struggle enthusiastically to perform their jobs.

It is the women journalists who will rightfully succeed in improving the status of women. They take on an important duty to act as "a pressure group" to advocate for several issues, including ensuring workplace equality between women and men, increasing the number of women in decision-making processes, and portraying the image of women in a balanced and non-discriminatory fashion.



*Selma Rıza, one of Turkey's first female journalists.*



Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink was commemorated in front of Agos newspaper's office on the first anniversary of his assassination, on 19 January 2008 in Istanbul, Turkey.

After the terror attack killing 27 people in Neve Shalom synagogues on November 15, 2003 in Istanbul, Turkey.



# The fading legacy of minority journalism in Turkey

► Alexandra DE CRAMER

Minority-run newspapers serve as Turkey's oldest print media, but have been on a downward trajectory ever since the founding of the Republic. Before Turkey was established, one in six of its 18 million population was non-Muslim. In 2023, this number has dwindled down to one percent of the population. The decline of minority journalism is a direct casualty of the demise of minority communities in the Turkish Republic.

"In the Istanbul of 1908, there were more

multi-language publications circulated than in current cosmopolitan cities, such as London or New York," says Ara Koçunyan, the editor-in-chief of Jamanak newspaper. Koçunyan is the fourth-generation family member at the helm of the world's longest continuously running Armenian language daily newspaper. Today, the publication sells around 2,000 copies daily.

The case of Apoyevmatini, the daily Greek language newspaper, is more tragic, as it has seen its sales wane to 600 copies per day. It was the most

widely read newspaper of its time when it was founded in 1925. Back then, 150,000 out of the 850,000 residents of Istanbul were of Greek origin. A community of 2,000 remain in Turkey, most of whom are elderly. Its longstanding editor-in-chief Mihail Vasiliadis prepares the newspaper with his son Minas in a room at his home in Istanbul's Kurtuluş district.

As a fourth-generation Istanbulite, Mihail Vasiliadis' career truly sheds light on what it means to be a minority journalist in Turkey. In 1964, as a 23-year-

old journalist, he was charged with "spreading Greek propaganda." His trial dragged on for 11 years, during which Mihail was barred from leaving the country, and had to act as his own lawyer since he could not find any legal representation. That year, all Greek newspapers shut down, apart from Apoyevmatini. A decade later, during Turkey's military operation into Cyprus, while tensions were at an all-time high with the Greeks, Mihail migrated to Greece. He continued operating Apoyevmatini from Greece until he returned

to Turkey in 2002. The 84-year-old is a treasure trove for understanding Turkey's relationship with the Greeks, and a living witness to his community's dismantling.

Unfortunately, these minority communities inherited from the Ottoman Empire were not necessarily included in the construction of the modern Turkish national identity. Being a Turk, has been characterized as a bond over a singular language (Turkish) and singular religion (Islam). Throughout the country's century-long existence, state-sponsored policies ensured the continued ousting of ethno-cultural and religious groups, and public perception of minorities has always been prone to manipulation. These communities have been used as pawns by those in power. But mostly, they are a group deemed dispensable when needed for a sitting government's power-grabbing strategies.

On September 6, 1955, thousands of Turks took to the streets of Istanbul to attack the properties of minorities, mainly those of ethnic Greeks with a spillover effect onto Armenians and Jews. It is commemorated as the Istanbul pogrom, and referred to as the Turkish Kristallnacht. There was pillaging and rape, while financial damages amounted to some \$150 million. This anti-minority sentiment was instigated by the then-governing Democratic Party, which pointed the finger at the country's Greeks in an attempt to divert attention from their political failures. Mob attacks of this sort inevitably led to the migration of minorities.

Since its founding, the

political terrain of the Republic has been prone to such attacks. The Justice and Development Party's (AKP) two-decade rule has not changed that. Like its predecessors, the AKP has not been shy of targeting minority groups for its own agenda.

In 2007, the assassination of the editor-in-chief of the bilingual Armenian newspaper Agos, Hrant Dink, occurred under the AKP's watch. The Dink murder trial was dragged out for 14 years as it brought to light the involvement of former police officers and top security personnel. Despite continuous pressure by the Dink family's lawyer the state officials who had played a role in the assassination were never brought to trial.

It comes as no surprise that today, the offices of minority-run publications are hidden. Jamanak has no shiny door sign suggesting

where it is. The offices are not accessible through the staircase, which is vaulted shut by an iron door. Guests are admitted through the elevator that can only be accessed if someone in the office calls it. Şalom, the weekly bilingual Jewish newspaper, is even more careful.

There are two security guards at the entrance patting down guests and checking their IDs, as well as bags, before the glass door opens with a buzzer. Rightfully so: On November 15, 2003, two suicide attacks were carried out targeting synagogues in Istanbul during Jewish prayer time. Each time the leading political authorities of the country, such as President Erdogan, utters hatred for Israel, the risk of a mob appearing on the doorstep of synagogues increases.

Ivo Molinas, the publisher of Şalom newspaper, has been navigating these murky political

waters as a leading figure for more than two decades. And as part of a politically charged minority community, he believes that "the natural state of journalism in Turkey is one of self-censorship." For media outlets that are already considered "other" and outside of society, self-censorship has been a method of survival. Hence that is why, in contrast to Turkish daily newspapers, minority periodicals print in the evening. This practice of waiting for the Turkish press to cover a story first, is entrenched in the founding of some outlets, such as Apoyevmatini, which translates as 'afternoon' from Greek. Self censorship, as Koçunyan understands it, is a historical reflex that comes with surviving decades of political crises.

In addition to this ongoing self-censorship, freedom of speech overall has worsened



*Established in 1925, Apoyevmatini was the most widely read newspaper of its time. Editor-in-Chief Mihail Vasiliadis published the paper with his son, Minas Vasiliadis.*



under the AKP. Turkey has become one of the top jailers of journalists worldwide. In 2016, one in three of the world's jailed journalists were in Turkey. Moreover, violence against journalists has increased and many more have lost their jobs.

This additional suppression has discouraged the younger generation from working in journalism. Regrettably it is getting even harder for these publications to breed successors. "It is not a lucrative job. I understand why the younger generation is not willing to do it. I will do this as long as I can, but I have lost faith that I will be able to find someone to hand over my job," says Koçunyan, who for over a decade has been looking for his replacement.

Jamanak is also unable to find young journalists to join its team. "The mastery of the Armenian language seems to be

lacking in the younger generation. To do this job, one needs a certain level of education. But more concerning, we are unable to find anyone willing to do the job," says Koçunyan.

Due to the current political and economic climate, most young people are looking to migrate abroad. "My children have moved abroad. Beyond convincing them to work in journalism, it is even harder to convince them to stay in Turkey," Molinas adds.

Indeed, the exodus of minority communities also means that there are fewer readers in Turkey. With the Internet, these print publications have had a chance to upgrade their systems to an online platform where they would be able to reach the diaspora. Jamanak, for instance, can be read online. Apoyevmatini sends daily newsletters to those who subscribe. "I receive emails from all

around the world. There are elderly people in Canada who remember the opening of the Moda Sea Club in 1935 and remain nostalgic about Turkey, who have thanked me for updating them on current events," says Mihail. By reporting on their respective communities' lives in Istanbul and beyond, these publications maintain a nostalgic bond with a growing diaspora, who remember what once was.

Sadly for those who remain, their community is aging. Most of the readers of Apoyevmatini are over 60 years old. "It costs 30TL to print a single daily newspaper that is sold for 3TL, but I have to keep printing. They are my community," says Mihail.

The archival value of these media outlets are unmatched. Beyond being examples of minority journalism, these institutes are time

capsules. They are living cultural heritage fixtures. As it stands, these media organizations do not have the staff, time or funds to make use of the history that they have collected. Their preservation would necessitate an interested third party to digitize these assets and make them accessible to the public.

As Turkey celebrates the 100th anniversary of its founding, there is a nostalgic overview of the diversity it shed over the years. Minority newspapers are a mirror of a forgotten past. Those still in print today are representative of Istanbul's cosmopolitan past, and are by no means representative of the larger Turkey. Their survival is linked to these communities' strong bond with the city of Istanbul. These publications are an important part of Turkey's collective memory, but their near extinction is almost certain.

# UNRELENTING REPRESSION OF KURDISH MEDIA

► Mahmut BOZARSLAN

Regrettably, when one refers to Kurdish journalism in Turkey, the first thing that comes to mind is repression. Throughout recent history, Kurdish media has always been the first target of repression. Having started in the 1990s - and despite having changed in form over time - repression has continued uninterrupted, with the exception of the brief interval during the peace process, until today. What started out with unsolved murders in the 1990s evolved into cases of battery, obstruction, lawsuits, detentions and arrests.

The pressure on the freedom of the press has constantly been on Turkey's agenda in the past years, and it is increasing by the day. As the AKP government became more powerful, repressions, which previously used to target only the Kurdish media, have expanded further, covering a broader range of targets. But targeting the Kurdish media has been a common denominator of various periods of repression in the history of the Republic.

The process of repression, which I have personally witnessed, goes back to the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. In those years, the country became rife with conflicts related to the Kurdish issue, and Kurdish media definitely endured more than its fair share of rights violations.

Although the language of publishing is mostly Turkish,

workers in the Kurdish media sector are defined as "Kurdish journalists" on the grounds that they are reporting the Kurdish issue.

Kurdish media workers, self-proclaimed as the "free press", started to have their voices heard in the 1990s, only to face attempts to silence them through legal processes. When the courts failed to provide a "remedy", along came the murders. Data from civil society organizations show that around 40 Kurdish journalists were killed by unknown assailants in the 1990s.

The repression of Kurdish media varied in accordance with the political environment. It eased during mild political environments but escalated when the political arena grew harsher. However, despite the occasional change in form, the repression has never lost momentum.

At this juncture, while there are no longer deaths, the repression is markedly stronger. Journalists reporting on Kurds are at a higher risk of being investigated for terrorism charges, regardless of their affiliations. In the 1990s, Kurdish journalists were silenced through murders; today, there is an ongoing attempt to silence them through the courts.

On the other hand, the repression faced by journalists

is not as visible as it previously was. This is because the repression has expanded its scope and now covers all media outlets, even those not close to the AKP. Although the priority is given to Kurdish media, all opposition journalists had their share of the repression.

Relatively speaking, the repression of Kurdish media subsided in 2010 and the ensuing years, while Turkey was focused on finding a solution to the Kurdish issue. So much so that if the news items covered in the media and social media at that time were to be reported today, the reporting journalist would face years in prison. It is worth noting that some of those news reports later became the subject matter of litigation.

The easing of repression had a relaxing effect, not only on Kurdish media but on the overall press. (There was such a big change that even state institutions such as Anadolu Agency went to PKK camps in Qandil). However, this spring weather was followed by an unprecedented repression after 2015. The peace process collapsed after two police officers were killed in Ceylanpınar; consequently, the PKK moved the armed struggle into city centers, which brought along the repression of journalists.

To give an example: In the

*Demonstrators carry signs that read 'We won't surrender' in a protest in October 2017.*



Silvan district of Diyarbakır, which is rife with street conflicts, Özgür Gün TV reporter Murat Demir was hit on the head and taken into custody for filming in the garden of the municipality. A gun was put to the head of Dicle News Agency (DİHA) reporter Serhat Yüce while he was taken into custody.

In 2016, İMC TV cameraman Refik Tekin was shot in the foot while following the conflicts in Cizre - the fire came from where the police were deployed. Tekin, who lay wounded at the scene for hours, could only be taken to hospital after press organizations called the authorities. He received treatment under the scrutiny of the police due to a custody warrant issued against him. These are facts that went on the record.

In several cases some journalists, including me, were threatened by the police with gunfire while filming. However, almost all of the criminal complaints filed about these incidents proved futile.

When journalists were unable to work because of the repressions, their fellow journalists in Istanbul set up a group called the News Watch Coordination. Group members launched the initiative "News Watch" to act in solidarity with Kurdish journalists in the region and draw attention to their problems.



The first set of journalists who went to the region to follow the news started to work in Diyarbakır province.

Over time, the severity of the physical violence subsided, but the repressions did not let up. Physical repression was replaced by judicial harassment. In particular, the state of emergency declared in the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt was effectively weaponized to steamroller over Kurdish media.

Decree laws were issued to purge the persons close to the Gülenist Movement, accused of plotting the coup. These decrees also rendered Kurdish media ineffective. A report by Bianet states that during the state of emergency, a total of 179 media organizations (53 newspapers, 35 television channels, 37 radio stations, 20 magazines, six news agencies and 29 publishing houses) were closed on the grounds of being part of the “Gülenist media”, “PKK media” or “leftist organization media”. Several Kurdish journalists were taken into custody during this time. Nedim Türfent, a symbolic name of this period, was jailed in 2016 and not released until 2022.

After the state of emergency ended, Kurdish journalists, who started to work in institutions that replaced those that were closed, continued to face repressions, this time by means of the judiciary. Beritan Canözer, a reporter with Jin News, an all-women news agency in Kurdish media, came under investigation for an interview she made with Zübeyde Zümrüt, provincial manager of the Democratic Regions Party (DBP) during the ongoing conflicts in Sur. Canözer was arrested and investigated until she was charged with “being a member of a terrorist organization” and “disseminating terrorism propaganda”. In 2023, Canözer stood trial in connection with a social media account that did not belong to her.

The experience of Ruşen Takva, a journalist living in Van, presents a striking

example of how the Kurdish media is perceived. Takva was charged with being “a member of a terrorist organization”, and the prosecutor asked for a sentence of 18 years of imprisonment. Below is Takva’s account of the lawsuit against him:

“A cut from a video filmed by security forces on January 8th, during a press statement by the Democratic Regions Party shows me in front of the crowd, and based on this cut, I was thought to be the person who led the crowd. The prosecutor’s office accepted this indictment. Based only on that photograph, the prosecutor thought that I was a member of an organization and brought a lawsuit against me, alleging that I violated Law no 2911 and that I was the person who led and managed the crowd in Van.”

Another legal action was brought against the workers of Jin News and Mezopotamya Agency (MA), which was opened in lieu of the shuttered Dicle News Agency. After reporting a news story about allegations that two villagers were thrown off a helicopter in Van, Mezopotamya Agency’s Van Representative Adnan Bilen, MA reporters Cemil Uğur and Zeynep Durgut, Jin News reporter Şehriban Abi and journalist Nazan Sala were arrested. They were charged with “membership in an armed organization” which carried a sentence of 7.5 to 15 years in prison. Durgut stood trial without arrest, whereas the four journalists were held in detention for six months and released after the first court hearing.

While Kurdish media outlets were shuttered, new

ones opened to replace them. These new outlets engaged in online publishing; they were not closed but faced online blocks almost monthly. They tried to overcome the block by adding numbers to their website addresses. For instance, at the time of this article, Jin News, established in lieu of Jinha News, was published at the website <http://jinnews41.xyz/>. The news agency continued running the website by adding a new number to its domain name after each blocking order. The website address shows that the news agency was blocked 41 times. Similarly, Mezopotamya Agency is currently publishing news at the website address: <http://mezopotamyaajansi35.com/>

A mostly criticized topic has been the lack of sensitivity across the country towards Kurdish journalists taken into custody. Nevertheless, it is important to recall the initiatives by a group of journalists working in Istanbul that increase such sensitivity.

The largest scale operations against the Kurdish media in recent years were conducted again in 2022. In June 2022, 21 journalists who were members of Dicle Fırat Journalists Association (DFG), and working at Mezopotamya Agency, Jin News and Pel Production were arrested following raids on their homes and workplaces. The journalists were charged with reporting news under the guidance of the PKK, and 16 of them were detained. It took 10 months to issue an indictment against these journalists. They could appear before a court after being held in detention for a month. They were all released

following a two-day trial. This raised the hopes of journalists who were still being held in detention.

While a lawsuit was not yet filed in connection with this investigation, another operation was launched, once again, into Kurdish media in October 2022. Eleven were detained out of 20 persons taken into custody during operations conducted in six provinces against Mezopotamya Agency and Jin News. This operation took place immediately after the Anti-Disinformation Law, publicly known as “the censorship law”, that had been debated for months in Turkey, before being passed by the parliament. There was a widespread notion that the law was first invoked as a strategy to censor Kurdish media.

These operations were an indication of what was to come for the opposition, specifically for Kurdish media, as the general elections drew close. It was obvious that Kurdish votes, which would play a defining role in the elections, could not be secured by the AKP and MHP alliance. Therefore, the only course of action for the ruling power seemed to prevent Kurdish parties from gaining votes (The government did not want problems in the region to be reported as it might cause Kurdish parties to win reaction votes if poor practices were heard among Kurdish voters).

In addition to the state’s repressive practices against the Kurdish media, it is also necessary to point to PKK repression, faced by another media group close to a certain segment of the Kurdish population. At the center of this repression are Rudaw and Kürdistan 24 televisions, media outlets based in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. At the backdrop of the repression lies the political tug-of-war between the PKK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), a long-standing political party of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.



*Turkey Journalists' Union rallied to protest the arrest of journalists on December 20, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey.*



Members of LGBT community take part in a Gay Pride parade in central Istanbul, Turkey, July 1, 2018.

## STRUGGLE BECOMES PART OF THE JOB FOR LGBTI+ JOURNALISTS

### ► Yıldız TAR

"If you want to be a journalist, you are forced to hide your identity, relinquish your identity and sense of being, and yield to harassment, phobia and mobbing."

These are the first words uttered by Sibel Yüklér, a journalist with 15 years of experience, when we hand her the microphone.

Yüklér was openly bisexual for more than half of her career in journalism. Until 2013, she worked at a local press agency and then at the Regional Directorate of İhlas News Agency. After working as an independent journalist for two years, she most recently worked at Jin News Agency, JINHA, which conducted gender-oriented journalism, and was shuttered by a decree during the state of emergency. Since then, Yüklér has continued to work as an independent journalist.

Yüklér's life as a journalist sheds light on the challenges of being an LGBTI+ journalist in Turkey:

"A cisgender, hetero- and male-dominant structure is ingrained in this sector, where we have

been working for years. It is worth noting that there is still an ongoing effort to keep the profession under the control of this male-dominant structure. We are talking about a domain where the heteronormative patriarchy is dominant at all levels, from decision-making to the work in the field.

This being the case, women and LGBTI+ journalists have been struggling for years. It is not enough to jump through the hoops to report the news, you also have to constantly bend over backwards in this profession. It is not easy at all to persist and conduct journalism in a sector dominated by misogyny, transphobia, and homophobia.

How many LGBTI+ journalists are there who are open about their identities? I am not even referring to the mainstream media but to the increasing number of alternative/dissenting media outlets where most of us prefer to work. We are working with many colleagues who are usually unaware of the identity of their co-worker sitting at the next desk, or, on the off

chance that they are aware, they display all sorts of phobic responses."

### Research results: Unemployment spreads amongst LGBTI+ employees

Research results corroborate Yüklér's experiences. A 2022 research conducted by Kaos GL about LGBTI+ persons working in private and public sectors reveals that LGBTI+ persons are compelled to remain closeted in the workplace.

LGBTI+ persons work in almost every sector; however, this social reality is not visible. Having to be closeted at work is not only specific to the recruitment process or the early stages of work life. Most workplaces have discriminatory rules and practices. In a country without marriage equality, LGBTI+ persons are deprived of several rights, including those related to wage policies based on the civil status of employees, and annual leave plans that can be made according to the schedule of spouses in the case of married couples.

LGBTI+ employees facing discrimination cannot claim their rights for sev-

eral reasons, including the fear of losing their jobs, the possibility of having to pay a higher price, the worry that their sexual identity would be exposed without their control, and potential challenges outside the workplace etc. Unemployment spreads among LGBTI+ employees, deepening their fear of dismissal and not being able to find a new job. In such circumstances, being open about their sexual identity poses a more significant risk.

### Hate speech at newsrooms

The same research shows that hate speech is also a prevalent problem in the workplace. The ratio of being subjected to hate speech in the workplace is 28 percent in the private sector, rising to 63 percent in the public sector. Media is one of the sectors where incidents of hate speech happen at work. Seasoned journalist Burcu Karakaş gives an example of an incident she encountered at a mainstream media outlet:

"I reported a news story in 2015 in Van province about a young gay person, Neçirvan, who committed suicide. I called Neçirvan's

friends, talked to NGOs in Van and reported the news.

The newspaper had a system where reporters could see how the news report was used on the page. The system assigns a code to each news report. The page number and the keyword are attached to the code, creating a label everyone can see in the newspaper. The label of the news report on Neçirvan was written as "16faggot". Not "16gay", or "16 suicide", but faggot!

I was upset about the loss of Neçirvan, and I got really mad when I saw this label. You have a news story about a young person who committed suicide because of homophobic pressure, and you record it as 'faggot' in a system for everyone to see. The editor probably thought no one would think twice about the label, and perhaps he was even laughing to himself while processing the news story.

I filed a complaint and the label was removed after I spoke to a senior supervisor.

This may come across as a small detail, but there is a mentality that sees no harm in mocking the news of a suicide. This goes beyond homophobic reactions to the Pride March. You have a news report on the death of a person. A person who committed suicide because of people thinking just like you, and you have the nerve to make fun of this situation!"

### **"Struggling becomes part of your job."**

"It is important to be able to open up about your identity in your life and at work, without being under any pressure, but it is not enough," says Deniz, another journalist we interviewed but whose last name we cannot disclose for security purposes.

"In the realm of journal-

ism, where it is already not easy to find employment, as its work culture is directly affected by social circumstances, phobia, biases and ideologies limit the range of institutions, as well as the safe working spaces where our LGBTI+ journalists can find employment.

Before I took on journalism, I did not think it would be possible to be open about my identity where I worked. Still, I have always been open about my identity. I see this as a consequence of the progress LGBTI+ persons have made in Turkey. However, the process will not be the same for everyone. The struggle becomes part of your job."

According to Ahmet Buğra Tokmakoğlu, a reporter at the daily Ege Telgraf with 10 years of work experience, the rights of LGBTI+ persons, recently depicted as "marginals", were not even considered to be a news item.

"Journalists have to deal with such major and structural problems in the media, in particular the local media, that it is not yet possible to talk about a platform where LGBTI+ journalists can discuss the problems arising from their identities or express themselves in the bustle of professional life."

Tokmakoğlu said that the struggle for the fundamental right to expression and the freedom of thought continued, adding, "I believe that media workers, who are always seen as the segment whose rights could be violated first, should act in unison more than ever".

### **Everyone talks about LGBTI+ persons in the media, except for LGBTI+ persons themselves**

As is the case in the backdrop of the media, we see a similar case of window dressing. The 2021 Media Monitoring Report

by Kaos GL states that everyone is talking about LGBTI+ persons in the media, except for LGBTI+ persons themselves!

As part of the research, a total of 4011 texts published in the written press were examined, and the results show that 43 per cent of the texts (1707) about LGBTI+ persons could be considered as rights journalism. 2273 texts, which account for more than half of the texts (57 per cent), either violate the fundamental rights of LGBTI+ persons or contain hate speech and/or discriminatory language or feed prejudices about them.

Subcategories of rights violations include discriminatory language, presentation of LGBTI+ identities as a crime, disease, perversion, immorality, or sin, as well as hate speech, hate crime and violation of the freedom of expression and assembly.

The same research shows that most of these texts did not refer to a source, or the columnists only wrote about their opinions. Only 45 texts out of 4011 sought the opinions of LGBTI+ organizations. The report provides further details:

"The emerging picture shows that the news stories aiming at an objective representation of LGBTI+ persons are merely careful not to violate their rights. But the stories of LGBTI+ persons are covered only when they are subjected to hate-motivated assault or discrimination.

The work and views of LGBTI+ organizations are not covered in the written press, and there is a big gap in reporting news of their success stories. Since 2017, this piece of data consistently appeared in our research findings and, when considered together with the other results of the research, it demonstrates that the media does not represent the lives,

opinions or struggles of LGBTI+ persons. Instead, it prefers to talk about them. Reading about the authentic voices of LGBTI+ persons in the media is impossible. This amounts to dehumanizing LGBTI+ persons. Instead of being represented in the media as agents that have lives, willpower, and rights, LGBTI+ persons are referred to, as it were, as a "problem" to be discussed."

LGBTI+ journalists who want to change this picture face intense repression while covering news stories, ranging from police brutality to prosecution.

Aslı Alpar, a KaosGL.org editor who was wounded in the leg by the police while she was covering the Ankara Pride March in 2022, says, "We are surrounded by violence. Violence, inflicting harm, the ability to inflict harm, and agency have a robust relation with power". Alpar states that hate speech in the media is closely related to the discourse of the government and adds:

"Explaining the sexist or homophobic statements of the government as 'an attempt to change the agenda' has not held any water for a long time. The agenda is women, LGBTI+ persons, laborers, animals, refugees, and animosity to nature."

Ankara's 2021 decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, arguing it was "hijacked by a group of people attempting to normalize homosexuality", was a part of this agenda, according to Alpar.

"The Istanbul Convention blocked the content that was demeaning to and discriminatory against LGBTI+ persons by ensuring that the authorities cooperated with the media. Well, what happened next? Those same authorities cooperated with the media and wiped out the Convention using homophobic, bi-phobic, transphobic, and sexist motives!"



Journalists marched from Galatasaray Square to Taksim Square, demanding the release of arrested colleagues and better protection for press freedom, March 13, 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey

# MEDIA OWNERSHIP IN TURKEY: Unchanging relations with changing actors

► Dr. Sinem AYDINLI

Media ownership is a structure that determines which topics to cover, which news items to serve, how to develop the discourse in news reports and the way to actually present the news. Accordingly, it also determines the framework of the right to news. Knowing the structure of media ownership, which is both an economic market and a political field, facilitates the assessment of interest-based relations between media owners and power groups while also playing a key role in advocating the right to news. Since 2022, media ownership in Turkey has been in the hands of a certain class; and media owners have political and/or economic interest-based

relations with the government. This situation is a major barrier to the freedom of press.

## Transformation of media from broken monopolies to the AKP years

After the 1980s, Turkish media established itself at the center of economic and political relations. Neoliberal policies transformed the media as much as it influenced the economy.

Dominated by families with a journalism background until the end of the 1980s (daily *Hürriyet* belonged to the Simavi family, daily *Milliyet* to the Karacan family and *Cumhuriyet* to the Nadi family), the press were taken over by persons whose real business was not journalism but managing investments in different sectors.

For example, the Kozanoğlu-Çavuşoğlu group active in the construction sector went into business in the financial sector and then the media sector in 1982. Owners of big capital started to wield power in the media sector. At the time, independent actors went below the radar.

In the 1990s, private ownership of radio and television broadcasting began with Star TV, led by a company whose partners included the son of then-President Turgut Özal. The advent of Star TV broke the monopoly of the state broadcaster TRT. Other businesspersons who owned newspapers saw an investment opportunity in private TV and radio and launched their own channels; consequently, the control over the media

soon fell into the hands of a few holdings.

In the 1980s and the ensuing period, capital owners started to use the media for their own economic interest, leading to a concentration in the field of media. Media owners, in addition to having political and economic relationships with political actors, also competed with each other -as in the case of Doğan and Bilgin Holding - to win tenders and incentive loans.

Dominated by five magnates (Doğan, Bilgin, Aksoy, İhlas, Uzan) with investments in finance, tourism and marketing throughout the 1990s, the field of media had undergone a radical change by the end of 1990s with the entry of ambitious newcomers, namely Doğuş (Şahenk

family), Çukurova (Karamahmet family) and Park (Turgay Ciner) groups.

### The AKP years of the media

The structure of media ownership changed right before the AKP came to power in 2002. The 2001 economic crisis led to the collapse of banks, almost half of which were media owners forcing these media groups (Bilgin, Uzan and İhlas) to withdraw from the market in the aftermath of the crisis.

The Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF), a state institution under the now defunct Prime Ministry, confiscated the media assets of owners who defaulted on their debts to the state.. The TMSF confiscated the media assets of groups in financial hardship, and sold them to groups close to the AKP and several political power groups. The sales made via the TMSF were presented as a way to ensure diversity in the media and boost competition. The TMSF played a key role in establishing the AKP's dominance over the media.

Between 2002 and 2006, the TMSF held authority over three newspapers, three national channels and several

radio stations. As a consequence of all these sales transactions, a new era began where new local and international actors came into play.

In addition to the Doğuş Group, which is active in construction and finance sectors, the Ciner Group, which is operational in mining and energy, joined to the media scene. With the easing of restrictions on foreign capital in the media, foreign investors also started to enter the sector. News Corp, belonging to Rupert Murdoch, bought TGRT, while CanWest, a Canadian media organization, bought Super FM and Metro, owned by the Uzan Group. Around this time, German Axel Springer group bought 25 percent of Doğan Media Group. This process took place in line with the neo-liberal tendencies in the AKP's party policy as well as the harmonization process with the European Union.

In the same period, AKP authorities pointed out the impropriety of the dominance of local media owners over the media, adding that their interest-based relationships with politicians were unsound.

The AKP came to power on the back of discourses

of democratization in human rights and the promise of political reforms, including curtailing the role of the military in state administration. AKP received the support of the media in its first term (2002 - 2007). However, in its second term (2007 - 2011) Doğan Yayın Holding leveled the first sharp criticisms to the party, which by then grew exponentially in power (the criticisms related to, inter alia, the Constitutional amendment that would lift the ban on wearing headscarves at universities and the Deniz Feneri e.V. trial in Germany). The mainstream media was still relevant in this period, and the AKP was yet to use its political tools of repression; however, it levied heavy tax penalties to bring pressure to bear on the holdings, forcing them to downsize.

It is again during this period that the AKP restructured the media together with its then-ally, the Gülenist Movement (Çalık, Koza-İpek and Sancak groups). The AKP's first line of action was to hand Sabah and ATV, which were confiscated in 2007 by the TMSF from Dinç Bilgin, to the only bidder, Çalık Group, in 2008. Berat Albayrak, the son-in-law of the then-Prime Minister

Erdoğan, was at the time the Group's CEO.

The AKP was increasingly powerful at the start of its third term (2011- 2015). Despite the changes in media ownership, there were not many structural changes in the relationship between the media and the state with respect to the control exercised by the state in the name of protecting "national sensitivities". The first indication of this was the "terrorism/press" meeting held in 2011, where media representatives were bombarded with instructions about how to cover news relating to "terrorism". The critical media regarded this meeting as a government intervention in news reporting.

By that time, interventions in editorial independence were explicitly made on the grounds of sensitivities about "national" issues: News reports about the Roboski Massacre on December 28, 2011 were circulated by several users in online media but it was not covered at all on television. A quote below from an anecdote told by Ayşenur Arslan, who worked at CNNTürk at the time, shows that the news story could not be reported before an "official"



Hürriyet Newspaper office building Bağcılar, Istanbul.

statement was made:

"Reports about the Roboski Massacre were on the Internet. I asked colleagues at the (TV) channel about it, and they told me they were waiting for the official statement. Governor of Şırnak made a statement and I mentioned this in the program. All hell broke loose. We were not going to report this news, they told me. Ferhat Boratav came to the production control room yelling out 'News about Uludere will not be reported'. I said that the Governor had made a statement. 'How is the Governor to know,' they told me. They were waiting for an official statement by the General Staff!"

At the time, CNNTürk was owned by the Doğan Group, which was a mainstream media organization that could criticize the government; however, there was no editorial independence when it came to "terrorism".

In the ensuing period, the TMSF continued to confiscate media assets and re-sell them to new owners. Mehmet Emin Karamahmet and the Çukurova Group owned by his family had many investments in the war industry and hence, had strong relationships with the Turkish Armed Forces. This situation deteriorated the group's relations with the government. In 2013, the group notified the TMSF that in compensation for its defaults on debt payments, it ordered the sale of its media assets to Kolin-Limak-Cengiz Partnership, a consortium close to the government and the winner of a recent tender for Istanbul New Airport. The request was accepted by the TMSF.

During this period, the TMSF started to assign executives to media organizations. For example, a former AKP deputy was assigned to the position

of editor-in-chief of the daily Akşam. Journalists opposed to the government were fired. By the end of 2013, Kalyon Holding, another pro-government group, came on the scene, having bought Sabah and ATV from Çalık Group. Serhat Albayrak, the brother of President Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak, was the acting chair of the executive board of Turkuvaz Media Group, operating under Kalyon Holding.

In its third term in power, the government supported allied media through state institutions. For example, in 2012, Halkbank procured advertising services from media organizations close to the government and signed sponsorship contracts with newspapers and/or television channels belonging to these media organizations. The same period also saw media holdings close to the government start to win public tenders.

The lack of television news reporting about the 2013 Gezi Park protests demonstrated the hesitant attitude of the mainstream media towards the government. The patron-client relationship between the AKP and media organizations applied to almost all mainstream media outlets as a mutual interest-based relationship was established.

Meanwhile, following the corruption and bribery operations of 17-25 December 2013, the support provided to the AKP by media groups belonging to the Gülenist Movement reached a breaking point.

In the aftermath of the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, Kurdish media organizations were also shuttered along with those belonging to the Gülenist movement. This situation intensified the concentration of media ownership.

In the same year, seven out of the top 10 TV chan-

nels broadcasting in Turkey had political connections with the AKP, and the owners of the top 10 most read newspapers had economic and/or political relations with the government. In that period, Doğan Medya was the only media group that could broadcast content that was somewhat critical of the government.

Political and economic alliances between media groups and the government increase the vulnerability of critical media organizations and the risks faced by media organizations with respect to legal and financial matters. It was not only critical news reports that faced sanctions by the government. Opponents or their rights-based opinions were targeted by pro-AKP media, whose relationship with the AKP included but was not limited to public procurement contracts.

The Demirören group, which bought Milliyet daily and entered the media sector in 2011, purchased all of the media assets of the Doğan Group right before the presidential elections of 2018. This changing of hands symbolizes the end of the mainstream media in Turkey. Following this sale, Turkey had government media on the one hand, and on the other hand, those media organizations striving to survive in the face of all of the economic and political pressures exerted against them by the government through a rich variety of available tools.

When the AKP lost 11 metropolitan municipalities, including those of Istanbul and Ankara, in the 2019 local elections, pro-government media organizations wielding media power reported that the elections were rigged. However, these news reports are said to have fallen short of convincing the public. This consequently

led to a downsizing in the government media.

During this period, print versions of TürkMedya Group's dailies Güneş and Star were shuttered. 2021-2022 data of the Media Ownership Monitoring: Turkey report reveal that by 2021, eight of the top 10 most read newspapers, nine of the most watched TV channels and top 10 of most read news portals had a (political or economic) relationship with the government.

The continued interest-based partnership between media and the government was further reinforced by economic and political pressures and intimidation policies targeting opposition media groups that were perceived as a threat by the government. Program suspensions and administrative fines increasingly imposed by RTÜK onto opposition media since 2019 and the suspension of ads by the Press Advertisement Agency practically guarantee the monopolization of media ownership. Therefore, under AKP rule it is not possible to refer to pluralism in Turkish media anymore, which is an essential condition of a democratic media environment.

Considering the periods before the AKP as well as the AKP era, it is evident that those running the government do not hold back from controlling the media when it is a matter of "national sensitivities"; this is the case even if media owners change over time. On the other hand, while media owners try to please several power groups, in the case of the relationship between the media, ownership and the state, the state continues to look out for the capitalists and in turn, capitalists continue to pander to the state to ensure its satisfaction.

# The Impact of Social Media on Journalism: A Perspective from Turkey



*Demonstration by Ukrainian patriotic political opposition in Kyiv on September 14, 2020.*

## ► Orhan Şener DELİORMANLI

Before the recent hype over artificial intelligence, “the big thing” for the global tech industry had been the rise of social media. Starting from the early 2000s, but especially after 2010 when Facebook and Twitter became widespread, and Instagram was launched, many speculations were made on how the Internet and social media impacted society. The arguments were mostly positive, in parallel with the general tendency of that time to consider digital computer technologies as “good things” which would allow humanity to

progress. However, the initial dream created by these powerful platforms has given way to various problems and challenges over time. The Internet and social media are no longer seen as “democracy machines” but, in contrast, blamed for many socio-political failures of the last decade, including Brexit, the election of Donald Trump and Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, the raid of the Capitol Hill, anti-vaxxer disinformation, and more.

The relationship between social media and journalism followed a similar path; in the initial phase, social media was seen as the next big thing

that everyone tried to take part in, but after 2015, (which had been a turning point since both Brexit and the US presidential elections happened soon after, in 2016) media outlets realized that digital platforms and social media companies were not only “stealing” their ad-revenues, but also making them obsolete in the eyes of new generations. Turkey offers a striking example of these dynamics: While social media was initially considered a positive force that would empower the public, in the post-2015 era, it came to be regarded mostly as a negative factor

against democracy, freedom of speech, and a contributing factor for government oppression, manipulation and propaganda. This paper argues that while the Internet and social media provide various advantages for journalists - especially in countries where freedom of speech is not well-protected - they also create significant problems that require journalists to constantly adapt to rapid changes.

### **The Decline of Journalists as Gatekeepers**

The concept of gatekeeping in journalism refers to individuals or

organizations that control the flow of information and news. For decades, the editorial decision-making process was done by the news media itself, and appearing on CNN or The New York Times was crucial for a politician to reach their audience. However, as Donald Trump showed, a pragmatic political actor with polarizing and aggressive rhetoric can now utilize social media, especially Twitter, to override the gatekeepers and reach broad audiences directly. The problem in Turkey, however, is more complex. In Turkey, due to the government's effective control over traditional media, there has been an increased need for, and reliance on, alternative news sources provided by social media -which was mostly praised by journalists as well - until it no longer was.

### The Promise of Democratization and the Digital Public Sphere

Social media has promised democratization by facilitating access to information and is even considered to be a digital form of the public sphere, as defined by Jürgen Habermas, in that it would allow citizens to not only access information freely and with ease, but also grant them a voice by enabling them to publish their views via blogs, then via social media. However, in Turkey, despite the effective use of social media in significant events like the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the government's control and censorship mechanisms question this premise.

The Internet and



*From climate change protests in Cape Town, South Africa on March 15, 2019.*

social media, are not weapons to be obtained and used against political opponents, but instead have become battlefields where each political actor has some level of access, in order to compete. Turkish politics, and the dramatic events of the last decade, proved this argument.

Before the 2013 Gezi protests, it was believed that while the secular opposition in Turkey had a good grasp of digital technologies, and could use those for organizing protests and spreading dissent, the government and pro-government

media was not that familiar with the Internet, especially social media (which consisted mostly of Facebook, and Twitter back then). Social media, especially Twitter, played a critical role during the Gezi Protests; however, the protests themselves were not that successful in reaching their goals (if there were any specific goals that the majority of the protesters agreed on - except, of course, the resignation of Prime Minister Erdogan). Social media was perfect for building links rapidly and gathering massive crowds, but not very efficient when it came

to maintaining the stability and longevity of those same links. Most importantly, after 2013, the government learned how to use social media for its own agenda, as foreseen by some careful critics of utopian views concerning digital communication technologies.

### Censorship, Misinformation, and the Open Web

Traditional journalism occasionally encounters censorship due to factors such as government pressure, and the influence of advertising. Many believed it would be impossible for governments to censor the Internet, and thus, that freedom of speech was going to flourish in this new era. And for a while it really did, as experienced in the protests of 2008 in Iran, and during the "Arab Spring". However, while the proliferation of social media has made such censorship more challenging; oppressive governments have also learned new ways to cope with the possibilities provided by the Internet. As of 2023, with its "Great Firewall of China", Beijing filters almost every bit of data that flows within its national borders (which invalidates early statements that the Internet made physical borders meaningless). Similarly, Russia intensively regulates social media whereas Iran has its own "intranet". In Turkey, the government's ability to control internet access, and its power to shut down social media platforms, limit the democratic promise of social media. Censorship on the web and social media in Turkey has



become prevalent and the exact number of censored websites is not even known anymore. Moreover, the ability of the government not only to ban but also to choke bandwidth, or locally restrict access to particular platforms, especially Twitter and YouTube, gives the authorities a significant advantage in the battle for information.

However, it should also be noted that, as a country with a really bad record of press freedom, social media has been providing journalists and opinion leaders with the means to spread their word when needed. Various digital-born news outlets, such as Medyascope, T24, Diken, Duvar, 9/8, and many others, have emerged in the last 13 years; in addition to the social media presence of the conventional "independent" media organizations that often fall into line with the opposition. Moreover, prominent journalists like Cüneyt Özdemir, Nevşin Mengü, and Murat Yetkin, and also "citizen journalists" like Metin Cihan, have been using the new possibilities of Twitter, YouTube, and others to reach their audiences online. Thus, it can be said that despite all the social media restrictions and censorship, there are still many holes in the wall.

### **Computational Propaganda and Biased Algorithms**

Besides censorship and restrictions, another problem with social media is related to propaganda and manipulation. While Russian trolls, psychographic micro-targeting or dark ads are

not problematic only for Turkey, it needs to be underlined that Turkey suffers from all these issues severely.

It is reported that various political actors that have ties to the administration utilize bots and trolls to blur the water, distract citizens, manipulate the information domain, spread propaganda, cultivate fear, create consent, and more, depending on the particular needs of their political agenda at the time. Social media platforms enable governments and other actors to use trolls and bots to manipulate public opinion. In particular, in Turkey, government-aligned troll and bot armies have a pronounced presence on social media, where they attempt to steer public opinion and attack critics.

### **Attention Economy and Platform Capitalism**

In the contemporary digital era, the "attention economy" concept has become increasingly pertinent. It is predicated on the idea that human attention is a valuable, yet limited resource. This concept takes on a particularly critical role in our understanding of social media platforms, where competition for user engagement translates directly into economic gains.

The mechanics of social media algorithms play a significant role in shaping the nature of content dissemination. With the primary goal of retaining user attention for longer periods (thereby leading to higher ad viewership or subscription revenues), these algorithms tend to favor sensationalism, drama, emotionally-

charged narratives, and entertaining content. As a consequence, rational, meticulously fact-checked journalism - the bedrock of informed public discourse - often finds itself sidelined in favor of more superficially engaging content.

This shift in content distribution has profound implications for news consumption, particularly for "hard news." Amidst the constant onslaught of information, vital news stories can often be neglected or entirely ignored, overshadowed by content that is more likely to strike a chord with audiences or incite an immediate emotional response.

Furthermore, this attention-driven landscape has also modified the role of journalists, pushing them into the realm of content creation where capturing attention becomes as vital as reporting the facts. The dichotomy between appealing to algorithms and audiences on the one hand, and adhering to journalistic integrity on the other, can lead to a difficult balancing act, where the latter can often be compromised.

In conclusion, the rise of the attention economy significantly reshapes the public conversation landscape, pushing sensationalism to the forefront while potentially marginalizing critical, well-researched journalism. This dynamic adds another layer to the impact of social media on journalism, highlighting an environment where the relentless pursuit of audience engagement can potentially undermine the foundational principles of the journalistic profession.

Moreover, a critical but mostly ignored issue about the impact of social media and digital platforms on journalism is algorithmic bias - meaning that the platforms have the power to promote or silence particular media outlets, social media accounts, individuals, and pieces. The tech companies' line of argument - that they are merely platforms and not publishers - is not satisfactory since it is their algorithm, and algorithms are far from being neutral. They not only carry the initial biases of the data they were fed, but they can also be tricked by malign actors. As it was shown in the IPI report of 2021, YouTube's and Google's algorithms in Turkey promote pro-government media while underweighting independent sources.

The impact of social media on journalism encompasses various aspects, including the democratization of access to information and the transformation of traditional media practices. However, this process of change also brings with it problems such as censorship, misinformation, privacy violations, and manipulations based on algorithms. Turkey is a striking example of these contradictions and issues, demonstrating that the impact of social media on journalism is complex and multifaceted. To put it simply, digital communication technologies should be seen neither as "democracy machines", nor as "the tools of the devil" but as battlefields to be fought on by all the actors aiming for a more democratic society.

From climate change protests in Cape Town, South Africa on March 15, 2019. From climate change protests in Cape Town, South Africa on March 15, 2019.



## Information disorder in Turkey: Disinformation, misinformation and mal-information

► Prof. Dr. Emre ERDOĞAN

“Hyper-digitalization” has been a major impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which we hope to put behind us. During the quarantine period when we had to stay at home, digital tools gained increased importance in our lives, offering solutions in a wide range of topics from education to shopping, socialization to business meetings. As “hybrid” models became widespread at work and in education, practices like “online” shopping have become indispensable in our lives. During the pandemic, as social media platforms were used by a large number of the global population, the volume of digital content reportedly

rose to unprecedented levels.

However, this “Brave” and “digitized” new world does not always bring about abundance and equality.

Hyper-digitalization has exerted a significant adverse effect on the information ecosystem. Even before the pandemic, digitalization had already transformed citizens from passive consumers of information to actual information-producing persons; the outbreak of the pandemic has greatly expedited this transformation.

Secondly, the pressure of speed caused individuals to share content without almost any fact-checking, resulting in the quick spread of dubious infor-

mation. This, compounded by an environment of panic and fear, has significantly increased the speed of information-sharing.

Social media platforms and search engines that have a significant place in our digital lives develop algorithms to attract users and get them to spend as much time as possible in their media. These same algorithms have broadened the appeal of false information, making it easier to spread. Consequently, they have created an enabling environment for incorrect information to thrive and spread like an outbreak.

The uptick in the circulation and volume of false information has caused international organizations and public authorities

to focus on the adverse effects of this situation. The World Health Organization (WHO) has coined the term “infodemic” and drew attention to the magnitude of the problem. An infodemic is an overabundance of information—some accurate and some not—that occurs during crises, making it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when needed. Infodemic was formulated as a public health problem and efforts were made to develop methods to tackle it.

Besides, it was acknowledged that the dissemination of false information had its own specific qualities, and a new classification was adopted under the gen-

eral term “Information Disorder”. According to this typology developed by First Draft, there are three information disorders: Disinformation, Misinformation and Malinformation.

### Three types of information disorder

Information disorder has two dimensions: First, it refers to whether information is correct or false, and second, whether the information is disseminated with bad intent. Disinformation is the term for incorrect information that is disseminated with bad intent. In the absence of bad intent, it is called misinformation. Finally, genuine information spread with malicious purposes is called Malinformation.

Disinformation is the most familiar among these concepts. The origin of the term “dezinformatsiya” can be traced back to Russia, allegedly first used by Stalin. Disinformation is the deliberate dissemination of false information by countries, groups or individuals to inflict harm on another country, institution or an individual. Despite being a new term, disinformation is believed to have occurred as early as in ancient Rome. Disinformation is spread not only by individuals but also by “trolls”, which do this as a job, as well as “bots”, which are a type of software. States are disposed to become prepared against disinformation since this is also seen as a concern for national security.

Misinformation is a less known, albeit more effective, information disorder. The origin of the term goes further back, but still its classification as a type of information disorder is relatively new. Individuals unwittingly spreading false information with good intentions is a very common

behavior that increases the dissemination speed of incorrect information. Studies show that most false information disseminated during the COVID19 pandemic was shared in good faith. The main factors that cause the spread of misinformation are the psychology of panic and fear, the desire to be rid

tion or similar information with the intent to inflict harm on those individuals, institutions or countries is seen as a security threat since it harbors the element of bad intent. Nonetheless, its legal status remains vague concerning the right to information or public information.

This category can



of uncertainty, and the inability to distinguish right from wrong.

Malinformation, the last type of information disorder, is a more complex concept to comprehend. The fact that the disseminated information is correct may seem like the action is “innocent”; however, since the person who is disseminating the information is malicious, the information becomes a threat that demands caution.

The dissemination of private correspondence between individuals, institutional classified informa-

include the stolen emails of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 elections or the recent wiretapping scandal in Greece. International organizations also find such actions detrimental to democracy.

### Disinformation as a security threat

Disinformation is seen as the biggest threat from the security-centered perspective, which argues that states should ensure the safety of their citizens as well as themselves. Authorities believe that internal and external actors posing a threat to the

security of their country will weaponize false information and disseminate it with a variety of tools. Hence, they are focused on taking measures against this.

For instance, the European External Action Service (EEAS), responsible for carrying out the foreign policy of the European Union, has an East StratCom Task Force, which has a mandate to respond to disinformation campaigns by Russia and China and regularly shares information on the website EUvsDisinfo. Since 2018, NATO has also identified tackling disinformation as a priority. In the USA, the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security both set up structures to combat disinformation.

It would be fair to say that our country has great sensitivity to disinformation. Those who have the memories of the Cold War era entrenched in their minds, often refer to the “Fifth Column” activities originating from the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War has not mitigated the sensitivity in Turkey to this issue. There is a widespread belief that some external enemies, including the European Union states, are targeting the unity and solidarity of Turkey. The “Sevres Syndrome” in Turkey significantly shapes the public attitude towards foreign policy and is often used by politicians for political aspirations.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan often refers to external enemies and their “Fifth Column” activities in his rhetoric; he has started to use this term increasingly in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt. Erdoğan also describes the Gezi Protests in 2013 as “an uprising backed by external powers” and usually

employs this view in his rhetoric. He argues that disinformation campaigns are carried out at home and abroad, including even at the early stages of the Gezi Protests, and sees disinformation as an enemy to grapple with and a global security concern that poses a threat to all countries. Accordingly, some steps were taken in 2007 (Law no. 5651) and in 2020 (the Law No. 7253) and a number of measures were adopted in particular to control social media.

Combatting disinformation in Turkey is not limited to Erdoğan's political rhetoric. Despite being presented as a continuation of the "Directorate General of Press and Publications", the Directorate of Communications, established right after the 2018 elections by the Presidential Decree no. 14, has the duty to combat disinformation in its mandate.

During the pandemic, the Directorate announced its intention to launch an official verification platform to combat disinformation, named "Is it true?". However, the project has not been operational for almost two years. In August 2023, a "Center for Combatting Disinformation" was established under the Directorate. Since October 2022, the Center has been issuing a weekly "Disinformation Bulletin", which refutes some media news. Since the bulletin mostly "refutes" the statements of opposition press and politicians, it can be said that the goal is to combat "domestic" disinformation.

### **Disinformation Law as a censorship tool**

The harshest action the government has taken in this regard is the regulation known as the "Disinformation Law", which

took effect in October 2022. The law's purpose is to "combat disinformation" and "prevent 'innocent' persons from being misled by similar content"; nonetheless, it is obviously a broader regulation that goes beyond this definition.

The law defines a person who disseminates disinformation as "Any person who overtly, and in a manner disruptive to public peace, disseminates false information contrary to the facts about the domestic and foreign security, public order, and public health, with the sole motive of causing distress, fear, and panic in public," who will be punishable by one to three years of imprisonment if found guilty. If the person disseminates disinformation anonymously, the sentence will be increased by half.

The lack of clarity in the definition of "genuine information", the vagueness of the concepts of "domestic and foreign security, public order and public health", and most importantly, the potential punishability of persons who just share information, empowers the law to function as a significant censorship mechanism. Indeed, the same regulation introduces an important mechanism of punishment and control over social media platforms and digital journalism. There are some predictions that the law will play a role which is restrictive of the information ecosystem in the country and will intensify self-censorship.

### **Turkey lags behind in countering international disinformation**

Although Turkey regards combatting disinformation as a matter of concern for national security, it is obvious that the efforts have recently been focusing more on

domestic disinformation. The Ministry of Defence has a website to refute "fake news", especially about Turkey's military operation in northern Syria. The Ministry of Health also participates in the combat against disinformation with its occasional press releases. Disinformation every so often comes on the agenda of the National Security Council concerning matters such as forest fires; however, we do not have any information that the Council has a specific agenda for foreign disinformation. Therefore, in contrast to examples, the government's approach to disinformation as part of the "hybrid warfare" is limited to Turkey's geography.

Some studies argue that Turkey, due to its geographical status, faces disinformation originating from Russia. There are claims that Sputnik and Russia Today (RT), which are operational in Turkey, regularly promote anti-American discourse and conspiracy theories, and propagate a false perception of NATO. There are also studies indicating that Russia's "information" campaigns in Turkey differ from those in other countries in the way that, rather than spreading fake news in times of crisis, these campaigns use fewer "bots" and "trolls" but distort correct information and disseminate it as such. At a time when disinformation campaigns led by Russia and China have become a global concern, the scarcity of systematic efforts in Turkey can be seen as yet another indication that Turkey regards disinformation as a domestic problem.

### **Critical thinking and trust vital to counter information disorders**

While Turkey focuses mainly on disinformation

vis-a-vis information disorders, efforts are limited to combat misinformation, which plays a much bigger role in disseminating false information. For disinformation campaigns to succeed, individuals need to be more vulnerable to misinformation; in other words, they need to be more inclined to disseminate false information with good intent. Therefore, disinformation and misinformation can be regarded as two sides of the same coin.

Studies have been conducted on why misinformation is widespread in our country, which group the reasons under three levels. Firstly, at the individual level, certain individuals, including women, older persons, ill-educated persons, people in poverty and persons that dwell at the intersection of these groups are more sensitive to misinformation. They cannot distinguish correct information from false information which they then easily share. Compared to other groups, they use social media less often, but they may end up having more adverse effects since they are much more active on certain platforms.

Weak critical thinking skills and low media and science literacy are among the key factors that facilitate the spread of misinformation. These can be regarded as the defects of the education system. The lack of critical thinking, compounded by the psychological state and the sense of panic brought on by crises, in particular the pandemic, renders individuals more vulnerable. The Conspiracist Ideation ingrained in the political culture of the country aggravates this vulnerability.

At the second level lie the institutional factors, the most important of

which is the politicization of the trust in the government and in state institutions due to the political polarization in the country. Individuals consider any information about the actions of the government based on their own political opinions, which in turn causes them to share false information about either the government or the opposition without questioning it.

Another institutional reason is the existing skepticism about international organizations in the country. There is a notion that international organizations, in particular the United Nations, NATO and the European Union, are futile and advocating only the rights of the West. This notion leads to the rapid spread of false information about these organizations. Politicians often exploit this situation which can be affiliated with the Conspiracist Ideation and the Sevres Syndrome which are quite widespread in the country.

Political polarization has also led to an eradication of trust in institutions such as the Health Board, the Central Bank or the Turkish Medical Association, institutions that are supposed to be autonomous and independent. These institutions are not regarded as reliable with respect to false information.

A third factor that increases the vulnerability to misinformation is the information environment. As yet another consequence of the polarization, the media tools, in particular the television and newspapers, are split into either pro-government or pro-opposition. There are only a few "mid-field" players that can report news impartially and have credibility in the eyes of everyone. Individuals find the media close to their political affiliation to be more accurate



and impartial, while they are skeptical about information received from other sources.

Closely linked with this problem are "echo chambers" where individuals engage, both in their real and social lives, with only those similar to themselves, preventing them from encountering opposing ideas. Individuals are more enthusiastic about sharing the opinions of people with similar views. The lack of control over social media platforms is as significant a problem in Turkey as anywhere else, and the rate

of persons who are aware of few verification organizations and who have the habit of verifying information is very low.

When all of the above circumstances are combined, we can see that the vulnerability to misinformation is very high in Turkey, and hence disinformation can easily be disseminated. This vulnerability is aggravated due to the fact that public authorities mostly direct their efforts toward domestic threats while grappling with disinformation. In turn, they fail to

put in a systematic effort to combat foreign disinformation.

In a country which constantly faces crises, terrorism and regional armed conflicts, an approach that perceives information disorders only as threats against the state and ignores the need to enhance social solidarity will significantly exacerbate problems at times of crisis. It is safe to say that this vulnerability will be heavily used by both external and internal actors, in particular during elections.



# The Pains of Professionalization in Turkish News Media

► Dr. Sarphan UZUNOĞLU

In the last few years, due to the number of imprisoned journalists and violations of freedom of expression, Turkey's media crisis has become infamous across the world. This may also be observed through the significant increase in the number of academic and non-academic texts written about Turkey's media crisis, and reports of international and national non-governmental and governmental organizations.

In addition to figures regarding the number of detained journalists or record number of violations of freedom

of expression, Turkey's media crisis seems to have reached its peak in two other ways: People's increasing distrust in the media, and the media industry's financial breakdown. Although these seem to be two distinct crises, they are in fact intertwined because people are reluctant to consume what has previously harmed them.

Unfortunately, Turkey's media industry is suffering from what Laura Basu calls media amnesia, which has done a great deal of harm to society. This media amnesia can be defined as a media environment in which Turkey's recent political history is quickly

forgotten by the media, institutions even ignore the archives of their own news, and the editorial monitoring and follow-up mechanism disappears. That's why it's essential to start this chapter with a reminder that journalism is a profession and that, at the end of the day, it requires a sustainable revenue model.

When one thinks of a newspaper as an object, one may think of a printed newspaper, and when a journalist is mentioned, a reporter chasing news on the street may come to one's mind. But the adventure of the newspaper as a product and as an enterprise is not just about making news. It is

a process that needs to be thought about when the newspaper reaches the consumer from the newspaper stand of a kiosk, and even before, when the nostalgic newspaper seller in Taksim Square makes the decision to buy the newspaper. In Turkey, the historical view of newspapers as a product has traditionally been weak. This has led to a synchronization issue, aligning with the global shift in perception regarding the value of the newspaper as a commodity.

We, as academics and experts, have tried to intervene in the crisis regarding the value of news as a product in

recent years. However, Turkey's media industry crisis, which has deepened since the mid-2010s, has not been resolved yet. The fact that the founders and managers of newsrooms do not have financial or team management know-how seems to be the main reason behind the problem. Unfortunately, many news products and brands that have identical target audiences without any differentiating characteristics have been released in the market, without even going through crucial steps such as product design, user experience tests, and - most importantly - market research.

Of course, Turkey's news broadcasting industry has never been a leading market in digital broadcasting globally. Imitation, localization, and application of products that performed well internationally have always been at the forefront. However, in our current situation, increasing self-censorship and the incompetence of the ruling class in both product-based thinking and quality journalism are pushing us away from international standards. Surely there are exceptions. In recent years, we have established globally recognized brands in the field of newsletters, podcasts and fact-checking. The common feature of these brands that gained international recognition, such as Aposto, Podbee and Teyit.org, is that they are not born from traditional newsrooms but from start-up culture.

So why does the news industry rise, not on the shoulders of journalists, but on those of young entrepreneurs who develop projects that serve the function of journalism?

Here, again, it is necessary to return to the problem of political parallelism (the degree to which media organizations are aligned with political ideologies of political parties) in Turkey's media environment. Therefore, most media organizations in Turkey are afflicted with a strange "savior syndrome".

The local newspaper of a small town, and a mainstream publication with millions of readers, focus on the same issues. It is possible to come across many news platforms that are identical to one another in terms of content, approach and even design. The savior syndrome is also somewhat parallel with the party media function of the Turkish media.

In Turkey, numerous news sites are created by various MP candidates to support their campaigns or build their long-term political careers. In other words, the newspaper is a tool preferred by investors in the context of its political communication function rather than its informative function.

In this hyper-politicized environment, a comprehensive professionalization cannot take place because journalists cannot stay away from political relations, and frequently switch to political advisory and similar roles. The burden of professionalization and producing original products falls on young media entrepreneurs who do not have a journalistic background, but who read the market well.

For this very reason, when it comes to sustainable journalism projects in Turkey, new generation media initiatives come to mind, instead of initiatives established by experienced reporters

and editors. Of course, these new generation institutions also deal with problems specific to start-up culture. But they differ from the generic newsroom which is, in many ways, stuck with the bad habits of the 1970s and whose only innovation is broadcasting on the Internet. From human resource management mechanisms to leadership types, these young publications have strategies and images that will be preferred by both the consumer, the advertiser and the technology platforms that set the rules of the field.

So why can't newsrooms established by journalists in the early- or mid-2010s adapt to the new media environment? Why do they have a cynical relationship with platforms? Why do they have a hard time producing a revenue model?

There is an interesting conservatism problem regarding technologies and monetization here. The clientelistic experience of the mainstream media of the '90s caused editorial staff to view relations with advertisers and sponsors as corrupt. Journalists with editorial experience, who set up their own newsroom with the help of grant programs and independent investors, also excluded these common financial opportunities such as advertising and sponsorship due to their political stances. Of course, the hyper politicized habits of advertisers, such as making their media planning decisions based on political position rather than mass reach potential, also made this process difficult. Still, many revenue models were out of the reach of newsrooms that initially broadcast in new media but were run by the older generation.

Because their content strategies and forms were designed without considering the audience they are not compatible with monetization: News that are mostly produced with good intentions, and that serve democratic purposes by amplifying the voices of different segments, do not serve the sustainability of the newsroom. This leads to a vicious circle whereby newsrooms seek solutions from different grant schemes that do not cure the problem, but treat the symptom of financial inadequacies. In the short term, this cycle seems hard to break unless grant programs invest in sustainability technologies, or programs that build these muscles.

Of course, it is wrong to ignore the restrictive effect of laws and regulations in the country. Moreover, the issue is not just censorship and restrictions. In fact, the clickbait regime in the country, as well as copyright laws and court decisions that trigger copy-paste content make the process even more difficult. Almost all processes, including the distribution of official advertisements, are hyper-politicized and corrupt.

In conclusion, it is feasible to say that Turkey's media ecosystem is home to a mix of issues and solutions. The country's political and financial landscape, as well as the decisions taken by the relevant actors will determine how the media system will evolve. In the future, we will need to deal with questions regarding the new media's business model, the needs of their target audience, and the course of technology.



*A workshop with university students organized by the fact-checking platform Teyit.*

## From challenges to success stories: Examples of good journalism

### ► Selin UĞURTAŞ

When considering the last century of journalism in Turkey, we witness an ongoing struggle between governments seeking to control and weaponize the media as a means to their political ends, and journalists, who strive to do their jobs diligently, in line with journalistic principles.

In his piece summarizing the history of journalism between the 1920s and 1970s, Recep Yasar explains that throughout the Republic's history, governments have been bothered by journalism's mission to keep the public informed and hold power to account. Each

and every government has yearned to control newspapers as propaganda tools.

Still, in the story that follows, where Former IPI Turkey President Ferai Tinç covers the history of journalism from the 1970s up until today, Tinç argues that at no point during the history of the Republic has journalism faced the level of devastation that has been inflicted upon it during AKP-MHP rule. Other details in the report, outlining everything from political pressures to physical attacks, financial obstructions to media ownership, support Tinç's conclusion.

Today, Turkey has the second-highest number

of journalists behind bars, just behind Russia. The work of journalism itself is considered a cause for punishment, whereas attacks against journalists, or even acts of murder, result in cases of impunity.

In a country where rising polarization is always a hot topic for debate, the media seems to have transitioned to a unipolar order: According to a 2022 report, all of Turkey's mainstream media groups are under government control. The situation is even more dire for Kurdish, women, minority or LGBTi+ journalists who have to deal with additional, grave pressures.

Under these circumstances, the extent to

which 'good' journalism is still possible is open to debate. Ipek Yezdani, who seeks an answer to this question in her piece, contends that quality journalism is still alive, despite pressures from the broadcast regulator RTUK, massive cash fines, and limited financial resources. In fact, the 'alternative' media has managed to ramp up enough of an audience to compete with the old 'mainstream'.

This is also demonstrated by the recent success of journalism start-ups: Behind them are young journalists who seek to rekindle objective and trustworthy journalism, and to carry out their work on par with international



standards.

**'We respect the reader's intelligence'**

These journalists, who have set out to fill important gaps in Turkey's media environment, care about building trust with their readers and listeners. They reject all labels, 'pro-government' and 'anti-government' alike, and emphasize their impartiality.

From day one, says Gulin Cavus, a co-founder of the fact-checking platform Teyit and a member of IPI, they have worked diligently to ensure the platform's financial and editorial independence as well as its transparency.

All of Teyit's fact-checking is carried out in line with its publicly available methodology. This methodology clearly shows how cases are selected, prioritized and which criteria are used to assess them. Cavus argues that this approach needs to become more widespread.

'We have a methodology because we believe this should be the ethics of the media. In an environment where disinformation is so common, we are also trying to remind the media of its own responsibilities. We are telling them: 'You cannot share disinformation to get more traffic or because it is in service of your ideology.' In fact, we are trying to empower readers and warn the media, simultaneously.'

In the current media landscape, where low-quality news stories are also common, and where it is hard to move past the noise, daily news bulletin 'Kapsül' was established to provide a 'trustworthy' alternative.

Kapsül was set up by



*All of Teyit's fact-checking is carried out in line with its publicly available methodology.*

two IPI members, Min-ez Bayülgen and Tunca Öğreten, and currently run by Emrah Temizkan, who has been a part of the project since the beginning. Temizkan says their aim has been to position themselves 'where Turkey's mainstream used to be'.

'We convey the news without commenting on them, showing respect to our readers' intelligence, and trusting their ability to think. There is no need to discuss the state of some 95 percent of the media. But even the remaining five percent does not convey news in this manner. So,

we wanted to provide that alternative. A group of journalists who do not belong to any political party, who have never joined any political movement, who purely want to do journalism.'

Surely, in our day and age where pro- and anti-government camps further solidify on a daily basis, attempts to produce 'trans-polar' journalism is no easy feat. Temizkan says people, who no longer trust the media, are very quick to label newspapers and journalists. This is because 'people have forgotten that this job can also be done by in-

dependent people, who merely want to do journalism,' he maintains.

The increasingly widespread use of the label, 'opposition journalist', is very problematic, Temizkan argues - clarifying that the term 'opposition' is not used to refer to core aspects of journalism such as seeking out errors, questioning mistakes, and being in opposition to whichever force is in power.

'Currently, in Turkey, those who are not sided with the government are called the opposition. Many have accepted being called an 'opposition journalist'. This is, in fact,

a major contradiction. These people are called the opposition because they are against the current government. But this begs the question: What happens when their camp comes to power? It's very unhealthy.'

Cavus agrees that their impartiality has not shielded them from any criticism. On the contrary, they have faced strong denunciations from both camps. Still, she believes their stance is not lost to the 'silent majority'.

'Impartiality and transparency has allowed us to build trust. There is a silent majority on social media that follows, appreciates, but never utters a word about it. We have managed to convince people that curiosity is enticing, and that it is important to fact-check.'

### Advertisers shy away from political news

Without a doubt, the issue of financial sustainability is a major problem for start-ups that strive to improve upon the media's ongoing troubles and put in place better practices. Advertisers notoriously avoid content that is political or which could cause problems for editorial independence, whereas readers are unwilling to pay for their news. Under the circumstances, quality journalism also requires coming up with creative solutions to financial woes.

For instance, Kapsül has four other bulletins in addition to its daily product: 'Business', 'Sports', 'Culture' and 'Sunday'. Temizkan explains that while the daily bulletin is the most-read, advertisers still shy away from it.

'They don't want their



ads in the daily bulletin because they think daily happenings in Turkey are dark and dull. They prefer culture or sports. Even in the culture bulletin, we had an instance where some sponsors backed down because of a title we chose. The brands are afraid. Even if it's just a cultural story, they don't want any part of Turkey's political agenda.'

Temizkan explains that even though they uphold their editorial independence, the challenges are real. He thinks that the ideal financial model would be reader-backed, which is a long shot in Turkey.

'In our country, journalism is considered cheap labor: As if there is a standard text and everybody publishes the same thing. They think, 'why should I pay you when there is all this free content online?', but in fact, a lot of work

goes into creating our stories,' he elaborates, adding that this may be overcome by publishing more and more exclusive stories.

### 'We try to understand the problem and the solution, and come up with a revenue model'

The podcast network and production start-up Podfresh, whose co-founders include IPI member Uraz Kaspar, overcomes the financial sustainability challenge by diversifying its revenue streams and cooperating with corporations. The network's co-founder Ilkan Akgül explains their financial model as follows:

'For the past two years, large corporations have been catching up with the podcast trend really well. These companies work with us for their large-scale, global projects. Secondly, we get to place ads inside

our podcasts. And finally, we have an academics arm, we visit multiple cities each year and give workshops. We also do some workshops online. For this last activity, we receive funding, which we then distribute to our teachers and publishers.'

The network, which was set up during the pandemic, has already published over 300 podcasts, and provides hosting, editing, and distribution support. But Akgül explains that their focus has always been on journalism, and that they strive to strike a balance for the continuation of quality journalism.

'Turkey's most popular podcasts are news podcasts. We work with Kisa Dalga and Medyascope. Currently, all podcasts in Turkey's news ecosystem are under the umbrella of Podfresh. We always support them, and this is precisely what I am most proud of: I think we really contribute to the news ecosystem.'

Teyit is another initiative that follows a creative line to ensure financial sustainability. Cavus explains that while Teyit received funding in its early days, they have tried hard, even during those times, to maintain a dialogue with their funders and explain to them the real needs of

Turkey's media sector. According to Cavus, Teyit refrained from shaping their work in order to fit the criteria of various funding opportunities, and this was a major cause of their success.

'Currently, a good portion of our revenues come from Facebook's third-party fact-checking program and TikTok's fact-checking program - this is the most vital aspect of our financial sustainability. But it didn't happen on its own. From the start, we have tried to really grasp the problem at hand, its various aspects, and its stakeholders. We got in touch with the latter to think of possible solutions. And if we could, we tried to transform this work into a revenue model.'

**'We always need to remind ourselves of the things we wish to change'**

So what do these young journalists who successfully lead media platforms think of the future of Turkey's media?

Akgul believes Turkish

journalists still have a long way to go when it comes to benefiting fully from podcasts as a medium - which he believes offers great possibilities to truly reflect the story behind the news.

Underlining that they have an important data set going back a few years, Akgul says both the number of unique listeners and the duration of listening is rising significantly, and will increase more over the next five years.

'I think podcasts offer a great solution to overcome how barren and mediocre news stories have become, and how we can no longer get 'hot' news: Costs are low, production is easy, publication and distribution are simple. Also, audio is a great medium to add layers to a story. It is also completely under your control, you do the distribution and everything. So if you are a good journalist, a good story teller, it's the best option you've got.'

Emphasizing that the journalist's duty isn't to copy and paste the

news, Akgul argues that in today's world, the story is king: 'Today, there is nothing more abundant than news. The trick is to tell what it's really about, to reflect the real story behind it.'

It is indeed true that low quality news, as well as disinformation, has become pervasive, and the core principles of journalism are being shoved aside. The circumstances require journalists not only to resolve financial bottlenecks but also to uphold the values that make journalism a cornerstone of democracies.

Temizkan believes the public no longer trusts the media - and rightly so, he says - but this trust must be rebuilt at all costs:

'Turkish society used to be a society that read a lot. There were multiple newspapers that sold over a million copies daily. Evening news could break ratings records. What rebuilds the society's trust is what we have been trying to do: Preparing the news

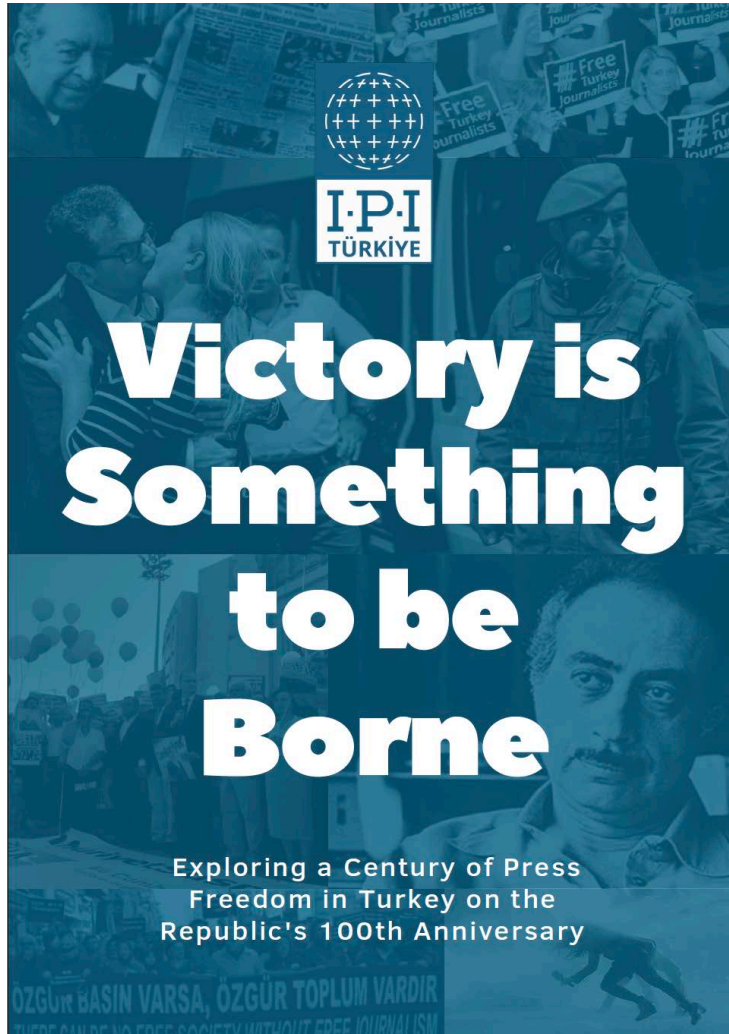
without adding commentary, without manipulating readers, allowing readers to make up their own minds, showing them respect.'

There is a lot to be done, Cavus agrees, but no one really needs to reinvent the wheel. It is important to follow global developments closely, she says, and to think how they may be utilized to create value. However, the most important thing, Cavus believes, is to always keep in mind the thing you wish to change, and the manner you wish to go about doing it:

'To a large extent, it is all about knowing your aim, knowing what you set out to do in the first place. What kind of a world are you dreaming of? What do you plan to do in order to create that world? With what target audience, and through which means? What are the problems you aim to tackle? You can't afford to drift with the wind. We constantly need to remind ourselves of the things we wish to change.'



*The academics arm of Podfresh visits multiple cities every year to carry out workshops.*



## NOTE ON COVER DESIGN

Abdi İpekçi (1929-1979), the second president of IPI Turkey, wrote in the 1947-48 yearbook of Galatasaray High School, his alma mater, the following quote as one of his favorites: 'Zafer biraz da hasar ister' ('Victory requires some damage') from Tevfik Fikret's poem 'Zelzele' ('Earthquake').

Photos in the collage on the cover (top to bottom, and left to right): Ahmet Emin Yalman, one of the founders of IPI. IPI member journalists from around the world, expressing support for their Turkish colleagues, holding banners that read 'Free Turkey Journalists'. A photograph that shows jour-

nalist Kadir Gürsel, then-president of IPI Turkey, kissing his wife, Nazire Gürsel, after his release from Silivri Prison on September 26, 2017 (taken by Yasin Akgül from AFP). A photo shared by journalist Selin Girit of a July 24, 2017 press freedom protest at Çağlayan Courthouse, also joined by IPI official Steve Ellis. Abdi İpekçi, the second president of IPI Turkey. A press freedom march held in Istanbul in March 2011. The moment when Ulusal Kanal reporter Hüsna Sarı, who was covering a protest in Ankara on February 13, 2014, was targeted by police water cannons.

For references, please see the references section at the Turkish version of our report: <http://bit.ly/100yilraporu>