

THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM IN TURKEY
AS TO THE VIEWS OF TURKISH PARLIAMENT JOURNALISTS

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THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM IN TURKEY
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ABSTRACT

THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM IN TURKEY AS TO THE VIEWS OF TURKISH PARLIAMENT JOURNALISTS

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Journalists' commitment to an objective, impartial, balanced way of reporting and their respect for ethical norms are considered a vital prerequisite for democracy to be carried out. The general purpose of this thesis is to reveal whether established journalistic practices in Turkey are shaped through commonly acknowledged professional principles in a way that is compatible with democratic expectancies. In order to achieve this goal, a group of journalists were interviewed in the summer of 2003 who worked as parliament journalists at some time in their careers. They were asked several questions mainly concerning the factors that might have influence on the processes of news making with a special emphasis on the negative consequences of the complex structure of media-politics relationships. The analysis of the interviews reveals Turkish journalists' views that journalism in Turkey is faced with serious problems and even may be characterized by a high degree of "degeneration".

Keywords: Journalistic practices, journalistic principles, media and politics, parliament journalists.

ÖZ

TÜRK PARLAMENTO MUHABİRLERİNE GÖRE TÜRKİYE'DE GAZETECİLİK PRATİKLERİ

Bayar Ekren, Duygu

Yüksek Lisans, Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

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Gazetecilerin nesnel, yansız, dengeli haber aktarımına ve etik kurallara bağlılığı demokrasi için yaşamsal bir gereklilik olarak görülmektedir. Bu tez, genel anlamda, Türkiye'deki yerleşik gazetecilik pratiklerini demokratik beklentilere uygun şekilde, genel kabul görmüş gazetecilik ilkelerine göre şekillenip şekillenmediğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç çerçevesinde, 2003 yazında kariyerlerinin bir döneminde parlamento gazeteciliği yapmış bir grup gazeteciyle yapılan mülakatlarda, gazetecilere, ağırlıklı olarak haber yapım süreci üzerinde etkisi olabilecek unsurlara ilişkin sorular yöneltildi ve çalışmada medya siyaset ilişkilerinin karmaşık yapısından kaynaklanabilecek olumsuz sonuçlara özel önem atfedildi. Mülakatların analizi, Türk gazetecilerin, Türkiye'de gazeteciliğin ciddi sorunlarla karşı karşıya olduğunu, hatta bir tür "dejenerasyon"la tanımlanabileceğini düşündüğünü ortaya koyuyor. Anahtar Kelimeler: Gazetecilik pratikleri, gazetecilik ilkeleri, medya ve siyaset, parlamento gazetecileri.

To Cosmos

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It has been agreed that there are direct and strong connections between democracy and a free-functioning media, and that a free media is the major prerequisite for a democratic political life. Thus, in its idealized form, the media is given the responsibility of informing the public sufficiently, regularly and objectively of events and different viewpoints. However, in liberal democracies it is argued that media professionals may face several obstacles in fulfilling this responsibility, even if these obstacles may not be emanating from the legal (normative) frame. In this case, the contribution of the press to democratic life naturally remains deficient, and even may have an adverse effect. Therefore, established journalistic practices in a country prove to be a significant indicator of whether the media in that country can fulfill a democratic function or not.

Journalistic practices have always represented a significant concern and a field of research for academics as well as politicians and media professionals. Many studies reveal that there are direct connections between the prevailing media system and the political system in a country. Nevertheless, significant divergences may be observed in the journalistic practices that are components of the prevailing media system in different countries that have similar democratic-liberal systems in essence.

Expressed from a different perspective, setting out the normative framework of how journalistic practices should be carried out is an important issue concerning everyone, members of the profession in particular. In this regard, significant steps have been taken, frameworks have been established and commonly acknowledged principles have been determined.

For the above stated reasons, detecting and revealing whether or not journalistic practices in a country have been shaped through internationally acknowledged professional principles, will prove to be a key criterion in comprehending the democracy level of the political life of that country. The reflections of journalists on the journalistic practices prevailing in their countries, therefore, prove to be an indispensable element in evaluating and characterizing journalistic practices, and constitute significant sources and points of reference for academic studies in particular.

This study sets out with the pre-assumption that the structure and functioning of media systems are shaped by the peculiarities – political, economic, cultural, historical, etc. – of the countries within which they develop and, in the very general context, aims to examine prevailing journalistic practices in Turkey by revealing the factors that have influence on the processes of news making. In this context, whether journalistic practices in Turkey are compatible with universally agreed norms and standards of journalism is of particular concern.

Related to the media's ever-increasing influence on social and political life, the complex structure of the interaction of media and politics and journalism as the main component of this relationship became a significant matter of concern in academic realms. The

second chapter of this study is concerned with these issues, with a special emphasis on the alleged connections between media and political systems and the evolution of journalism in liberal democratic countries. In this chapter, the common elements of universally agreed principles of journalism are reviewed with the purpose of understanding the general consensus on “how true journalism should be”, according to media professionals themselves.

The development of media and journalism in Turkey is reviewed in the third chapter, so as to understand the general situation in the country and its influences on the evolution of journalistic practices. In this chapter, Turkish journalists’ attempts to protect their profession against outside pressures will also be touched on, as well as the general frame of agreed professional norms and standards.

As stated, this study is mainly composed of an analysis of the statements of a group of journalists who were responsible for reporting political affairs, with the presumption that, characteristic patterns of political culture and structure shape the development of media and affect journalists’ conceptions of their role and practices.

Thus, the method of in-depth interviewing was utilized in this study. The interviewees were asked to comment on general issues such as the media system they functioned in, how they perceived their roles in political and social spheres and what kind of relations they established with their sources. In this context, the reason why interviewees with experience in parliament journalism were selected was simply because their duty was covering the parliament, where politics and political diversity are actively carried out at all times. Therefore, 14 journalists who worked as parliament journalists at some time in their careers were interviewed in the summer of 2003. It

is thought that the opportunity they were given for sharing the same environment with their sources and the diversity of the issues they were responsible for covering enabled them to be more involved in this complex web of relationships between media and politics.

The statements of journalist interviewees revealed that media professionals in Turkey face several difficulties in realizing the ideal of objective and impartial reporting due in part to the challenges connected with current media ownership structure and in part to the lack of a proper media regulation policy. They are not able to fulfill their responsibility to serve the public interest and can not even protect the dignity of their profession. On the other hand, journalists speak of a high degree of “degeneration” in the Turkish media system. This condition, which has been dealt with in many media studies, acquires a more significant and solid aspect in the statements of the interviewees. What the journalists have stated allows for a better understanding of how media can dissociate from the public’s interest, due to the lack of a legal framework that would protect the public and the journalists from interest struggles among power circles.

CHAPTER 2

JOURNALISM IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

It has been agreed that a free, independent media that allows citizens to make rational choices depending on alternative sources of accurate information is essential for the smooth functioning of democracy. In this context, the media is attributed roles other than with “monitoring”. As defined by McNair, the media is expected to educate, to provide a platform for public political discourse, to give publicity to governmental and political institutions, to serve as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints and to enable citizens to make rational and effective use of information circulating in the public sphere. (McNair, 1999: 21)

Consequently, as the exercise of rational choice presupposes a knowledgeable, sufficiently educated and well informed electorate, the media and its practitioners are given the role of conveying political information in an objective, impartial and balanced manner. However, this ideal may not be so easy to realize as the news production process is likely to be influenced by a considerable number of factors and actors pursuing several interests. Despite the existence of a set of professional principles that make journalistic practices compatible with democratic functions, there may be some obstacles for journalists committed to these in practice. Thus, in media literature, the question of “how journalism should be and how

it is” has been subjected to a number of serious discussions. In this context, some academics insist that media professionals do not live in a social vacuum and their work practices can not be isolated from economic, political, social, cultural or historical factors that are likely to influence the news production process. Consequently, in order to evaluate how journalistic practices are shaped in liberal democracies, it is suggested that one should first understand the alleged connections between media and other sub-systems of the broad social system in a country.

In this chapter, the assessments of some scholars on the alleged connections between media and political systems will be evaluated in order to have an idea of the factors that are likely to influence the development of the media and journalism in a country. Then, some contemporary evaluations of the current situation of journalistic practices and possible challenges that journalists face in liberal democracies will be examined. Finally, common elements in declarations of journalistic principles drafted by media professionals will be looked at with an aim to understand journalists’ attempts to draw a normative frame of ethical norms and standards for their profession.

2.1 Media and Political Systems

In scholarly work, it is agreed that the media has gained prominence in social and political life due to its gradually consolidating power base. In this context, even a quick look at recent academic work reveals that there are a number of contrasting viewpoints, along with many areas of agreement regarding the position of media in the wider processes of social and political communication.

In the general scope of media-politics studies, there are roughly two main contrasting perspectives. The former is the view that assumes media is a vehicle of communication between competing groups to ensure sufficient exchange of ideas and to enable the status quo to be tested against possible alternatives. (Davison, 1970: 22-24)

According to this approach, it is believed that in a system where power is shared by a plurality and a diversity of groups, the media, as being an agent to complement such an order, serves as a channel reflecting faithfully the multifarious viewpoints and interests of competing groups in a balanced and impartial way.

In contrast to this view, the latter approach insists that the opportunities for competing groups in a democracy to make use of communication channels is never perfect, as the media is conceived as closely linked to the dominant power structure through “ownership, legal regulation, the values implicit in the professional ideologies in the media and the structures and ideological consequences of prevailing modes of newsgathering”. (Curran et al., 1982:16)

Furthermore, pointing to an intermediate position, some scholars characterize the relationship between media and political circles as a kind of “mutual dependence” with the special emphasis that it comprises a tension between the needs of “mutual accommodation” and “various sources of conflict”. (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1979: 28) This earlier assumption is later reiterated as “the interaction between media, politics and commerce implies a degree of mutual dependence and adaptation while at the same time assumes a complex and contradictory framework”. (Mancini, 1993: 34) As reported by Curran et al., the scholars supporting the “mutual dependence” thesis point out that, “while media are dependent on the central institutions of

the society for their raw material, these institutions were at the same time dependent on media to communicate their viewpoints to the public". (Curran et al., 1992: 21)

At the core of such evaluations lies the claim that political actors and institutions compete with media along with other sub-systems in order to obtain required power and consensus. In this respect, media is conceived as having a potential "to restructure the timing and the character of political events, to define crisis situations to which politicians are obliged to react, to require comment on issues that media personnel has emphasized as important, to inject new personalities into the political dialogue and to stimulate the growth of new communication agencies". (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1979: 274-275) As some scholars define this potential as an opportunity for competing groups to exchange ideas, (Davison, 1970: 22-24) some others point out that it makes media a source of "discomfort" for political actors vying to control the information circulating in the public sphere and to influence the final product (news) despite their limited capacity to achieve this legally. ¹

While some approaches indicate that "the politicians are trapped between the interference of media and the demands of audiences/readers" (Pye 1963, 6-7) or "a new type of politician has emerged whose carrier is determined by media professionals" (Alver, 1988: 39-52), some other researchers insist that political actors are quite successful at using media to serve their interests. In recent work, many scholars have come to the conclusion that politicians try to use mass media "to influence other actors", "to communicate with each other to negotiate and break agreements" or "to leak information

¹ According to some scholars, political actors appealed to some indirect methods such as "active information production" and holding the control of the sources to keep opened or closed to the use of media practitioners or by "granting and denying access" in order to control information. The prominence of "political advertising" in

with an aim to deliver the message to the administration or to undermine their rivals". (Alver, 1998: 40-45, Schudson, 2003: 140, Mancini, 1993: 36) These assertions are also supported by a recent suggestion that "the media may be involved in a horizontal process of debate and negotiation among elite factions rather than a vertical process of communication between political elites and ordinary citizens". (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 22-25)

The allegedly "unfavorable" change in media coverage of politics is another point of concern in contemporary media studies. Some scholars charge that entertainment value takes precedence over information content as journalists become more and more oriented towards ratings and circulation. In this context, it is argued that "media coverage of politics gives more space to the private lives of politicians and horse-race aspects of political debate" (Kuhn and Neveu, 2002:12) and the pursuit of profit, elite deviance and sensationalism makes political news driven by market forces rather than public interest. Here, critical scholars point to owners' interest maximization as the underlying cause of inevitable change in the political coverage. According to them, political media is subjected to "marketization, commercialization and commodification" as well as "negative impacts of new technologies on news gathering and presentation". (McNair, 2000: 1-8)

As this short review partly displays, it can be argued that there is no single model to analyze the world's media systems and their relation to politics. It is even questioned whether the media may be serving different purposes as they appear in widely different forms in different countries.

recent years was conceived as another attempt of politicians to achieve this goal. (Schudson, 2003: 138, Alver, 1998: 39-52)

As an attempt to understand the roots of these national variations, a recent approach has become prominent in which scholars criticize previous studies that use generalized concepts in the confines of highly ethnocentric approaches. Consequently, they suggest that the considerable variation among media systems of different countries should be taken into account, as each media system is conceived as being linked structurally and historically to the development of that country's political systems.

According to this point of view, the development of media systems is directly related to a country's history, social development and general conditions. In other words, depending on some comparative research, it is argued that the study of the development of each media system can not be isolated from the impact of peculiar historical, political, economic and cultural dynamics of the country within which that media system develops.

As Kaya emphasizes, media systems develop by constituting a parallelism with political systems, another subsystem of the broad social system. Diversity of political systems, peculiar histories and conditions of countries taking place within the same system have paved the way for so many different formations that they cannot be contained in a general analysis. Communication systems should be analyzed as structures altering in parallel with social developments and changes. (Kaya, 1985: 165)

In a recent study it is claimed that many factors can contribute to sharp difference among different countries' media systems. These factors include: the structure of media markets, development of mass circulation press, the nature of the newspapers, their relation to their audience and their role in the wider processes of social and political communication, the strength of connections between the media and

political actors, the balance between the advocacy and neutral/informational traditions of political journalism, the shape and the degree of state intervention in the media, governance and functioning of public broadcasters and regulatory agencies responsible for supervising broadcasting, etc. For example, according to this point of view, the autonomy of media institutions is seen to be more limited in countries where a high degree of ideological diversity and conflict, a strong role of state in society and a strong role of political parties prevail. It is possible to talk about a certain degree of press freedom in other countries where the role of the market is traditionally strong and the role of the state is relatively limited.²

According to this approach, it can also be argued that there is no single model to evaluate journalistic practices, as they vary considerably across media systems. In the following section, main points of concern in recent studies about the practice of journalism will be reviewed in order to have an idea of some significant factors that are likely to influence the development of journalism and how it is made in liberal democracies.

2.2 Journalistic Practices

The evolution of journalistic practices has been a serious matter of concern in recent studies about the democratic role attributed to the media. As repeatedly emphasized before, in a democratic system journalists, as the main actors of political news production, are expected to inform the public in a way that is compatible with democratic expectancies. Therefore, in this respect, possible obstacles to objective, balanced and sufficient reporting of events and competing viewpoints are the main concerns of academic research.

² See Hallin and Mancini, 2004

Recent studies examined predominantly the existence or non-existence of “autonomy” and “common professional norms” for journalists and whether journalists are serving “public interests”, as these factors are considered as the vital components of professionalization of journalism.

In this context, various factors are taken into account, ranging from alleged risk of subjectivity to political-economic pressures coming from inside and outside the media institution and the structure of newsmakers’ relationship with news sources, while questioning the possible obstacles to reaching the idealized form of true journalism in liberal democracies.

While evaluating the current situation of journalistic practices in a country, these studies predominantly question the ownership structure of the media. In this context, the primary objective of media owners is claimed to be highly determinative on the final product. It is generally argued that in a media system where media owners are also the owners of other companies, the primary objective of the media institution may not be solely to serve public but also the personal, political and economic interests of the owner.

On the other hand, it is also argued that the media and its practitioners may be used by outside actors such as parties, politicians, social groups, social movements or economic actors seeking political influence. These “outside actors” trying to use media to intervene in the world of politics might be political, commercial or both might coexist and this may be a serious obstacle in some countries for journalism to be strongly professionalized. (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 37)

One other issue subjected to serious debate is the dichotomy of partisan and objective reporting, as journalists are expected to resist political linkages and loyalties while at the same time being given the duty of dealing with politics closely.

In this respect, there are several approaches. According to the view that conceives of journalists as rational, responsible, autonomous and impartial professionals, “bias” is defined as one of the rare obstacles to reflecting the events accurately. It is believed that it is possible to demonstrate and eliminate bias when acknowledged, which is claimed to stem from “prejudices and social attitudes” of communicators. (Inal, 1992: 33-36).

On the other hand, some scholars insist that news production process should be examined in a wider economic and political context. They take into account possible factors that are likely to influence the product of journalists, ranging from personal and organizational ideological orientations to the alleged risk to journalists who behave as supporters of political parties and parliamentary cliques. Some argue that there are more than enough analyses to show that these professionals’ accounts of political events are laden with value judgments and subjectivities. However, others note that “general employment situation for journalists”, “ideological orientation of the media institution they worked for” and “structural requirements of their role as professional workers” may limit the influence of these subjectivities on the final product. (McNair, 1999:12; McCullagh, 2002: 72-74)

In academic work, the “emergence of a new type of journalism” depending on the requirements of evolving structures of the media-politics relationship is also central to some criticisms. Here it is pointed out that journalists are appealing to a more “interpretative”

form of news making and become more concerned to “decipher and divulge the tricks and hidden tactics of politicians” rather than evaluating the political activities of a leader or a parliamentary bill. It is also claimed that some journalists tend to behave like a “political actor”, act as a “journalist pundit”³ or as an “official spokesman” of particular politicians or political groups. (McNair, 1999: 73-89; Neveu, 2002: 24; Mancini, 1993: 36, 37)

The structure of the journalists-news source relationship is seen as another important component of journalistic practices. In this context, the existence of “friendship” and “political parallelism” between two groups and the belief that these may have negative impacts on news making – obstructing journalists’ commitment to their primary imperatives – is a focus of interest in the field of study. Some researchers spoke of a kind of “mutual dependence” between media representatives and other social institutions, some skeptics pointed to a “heavy reliance” of journalists on their sources. (İnal, 1992:55)

According to the Hallin and Mancini, who assert that media systems and journalistic practices are directly related to the peculiarities of countries including different political system characteristics, in the countries where political parallelism is very high, media organizations are strongly tied to political organizations and journalists are deeply involved in party politics. It is argued that, journalists’ work incorporated “political values which arouse from a range of influences, from routines of information gathering to recruitment

³ McNair’s categorization of “journalist pundits” –as someone who was accepted both by the readers and political class as an authority on political affairs- referred to columnists and feature article writers, not political reporters. According to the author, while the members of the former category became “sources of opinion formation and opinion articulation, agenda setting and agenda evaluation”, reporters were expected to remain committed to the rules of objective reporting and “their subjectivity and interpretative work had to be confined to the analyzing of the situation”. (McNair, 1999: 73-89)

patterns of journalists and shared ideological assumptions of the wider society” even if they remained committed to the journalistic principle of “objectivity”. According to the authors, in some countries journalists may have an inclination to influence public opinion as an “advocator” or “commentator”, while in other countries they may conceive of themselves “as reporters of neutral information”. (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 26-38)

However, despite the diversity of practices, the expectancy from the media to contribute to democracy is seen as a common concern, best observed in attempts to draw a normative frame concerning “how journalism should be” primarily by the media professionals themselves. The outcome of these efforts and common elements of nationally agreed professional principles will be overviewed in the following pages.

2.3 The Issue of Self Regulation and Principles of Journalism

The phrase “self regulation” in this study refers to the efforts of media professionals to ensure journalism is strongly professionalized and to prevent law makers from adopting restrictive rules that are likely to influence journalistic practices in a way that is incompatible with democratic expectancies.

Journalism organizations have been established in almost every country, whether in the form of associations, unions or press councils. These organizations adopted a set of principles to draw normative frames to govern journalistic practices, widely known as "code of ethics", “professional code of conduct”, "canons of journalism" or more generally as “principles of journalism”. In this regard, the aforementioned professional organizations, especially the

press councils, and individual media institutions are given the responsibility of predicting possible violations of these principles and taking necessary measures against them.⁴

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that these principles' primary basis for judgment should be journalists' own "conscience" and "sense of responsibility", since finding adequate sanctions has proved to be problematic in practice. (Demir, 2005)

Today it is not so difficult to find many documents, adopted by professional associations, unions, federations and press councils of the world's media systems, which aim to draw a normative framework pointing out the rights, duties and responsibilities of journalists. Among them, an online "databank of European codes of journalism ethics" offers basic information on media ethics for journalism and includes a collection of codes of journalism ethics from most of the European countries, in English.⁵ The data collected in this site makes it easy to see the common elements of journalistic principles in 36 countries ranging from Armenia to the United Kingdom, despite a considerable difference in social, political, economic, historical and cultural peculiarities. Along with some additional elements, it can be seen that principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability are common elements in nationally recognized declarations of journalistic principles.

In these documents, where full respect to freedom of press and the public's right to know is primarily emphasized, there are other

⁴ For detailed information on self-regulation practices of the world's media systems see Alemdar, 1990.

⁵ See EthicNet in <http://www.uta.fi/ethicnet/> in order to reach the databank for European codes of journalism ethics, maintained by the Journalism Research and Development Centre at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Tampere, Finland. The database is supervised by Prof. Kaarle Nordenstreng and Dr. Ari Heinonen.

elements fortifying the basic principles stated above. In this context, it is put that the responsibility of journalists towards the public has priority over any other responsibility, particularly the responsibility to their employers and state organs. According to these texts, where the necessity of unequivocal separation between comment and factual information is emphasized, journalists should maintain professional secrecy, should respect the confidentiality of their sources, when this is requested, should always verify facts, acknowledge mistakes and correct them immediately and should not violate human rights.

Another common element of these different declarations of professional principles is that journalists must not suppress information for personal interests or under pressure from someone having personal, commercial or other interests of any kind.

According to these documents, a journalist should avoid discrimination, manipulation, plagiarism, conflicts of interest, acceptance of any advantage or benefit offered in exchange for the restriction of her/his independence, malicious distortion of facts, calumny, slander, libel and unfounded accusations, as all these are considered grave offences against the profession of journalism and a betrayal of public trust.

Here it should also be noted that, along with these statements drafted by national or international professional journalism associations, some individual print, broadcast and online news organizations also declare their own ethical and professional standards. The BBC Editorial Guidelines⁶, Aljazeera Code of Ethics⁷ or New York Times

⁶ For full text of The BBC Editorial Guidelines visit
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/>

⁷ For full text of Aljazeera Code of Ethics visit
<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=5190>

Ethical Journalism Guide Book⁸ may be stated as examples of this initiative. These also have content similar to the above-mentioned documents, in which the protection of the dignity of the media institution is also given considerable importance.

Consequently, as stated by Demir, universally agreed principles of journalism include some common principles, such as:

1. The rule of accuracy – truthfulness;
 2. The rule of remaining impartial and objective;
 3. The rule of distinguishing news from commentary;
 4. The rule of respect for privacy or confidentiality;
 5. The rule of conserving the boundaries of criticism – refraining from slandering, labeling, disgracing and unfounded allegations;
 6. The rule of respect for the right of response and correction;
 7. The rule of rejecting personal interests and financial benefits;
 8. The rule of preventing (employer's) institutional interests to cast shadow over facts;
 9. The rule of standing against terrorism, violence and pornography.
- (Demir, 2005)

Nevertheless, as repeatedly emphasized in this study, the bulk of critical journalism studies shows that the general situation of the media system in a country and its relation to other subsystems may not pave the way for all these professional rules to be implemented in practical life, even if these principles are supported by laws in some liberal democratic countries. Functioning of the media and the practice of journalism are so intertwined with social, political and economic processes that any conflict and deficiency in these spheres is claimed to be directly reflected in news production process, making

⁸ For full text of New York Times Ethical Journalism Guide Book visit <http://www.nytimes.com/company-properties-times-coe.html>

prevailing modes of journalistic practices an important signification of whether media is serving democratic purposes in a country.

CHAPTER 3

JOURNALISM IN TURKEY

3.1 Development of Turkish Media

Turkish media history seems to verify Gurevitch and Blumler's assertion that "all political systems generate principles derived from the tenets of their political cultures for regulating the political role of the mass media" (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1979:282). As will be seen in the following pages, many academics evaluating historical facts agree that democratic claim of media to pave the way for freedom of expression and press has always been overshadowed by the will of powerful actors and institutions to use the power of mass media on behalf of their political or economic interests.

After the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, during the single party regime - established de facto in 1925 and ended at the end of 1945 - Turkish press and radio was dominated by the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi - CHP). In this period, journalists were supposed to be the foremost spokesmen of the regime. The fate of press and radio was not changed by the introduction of a multi-party system in 1946, despite the Democratic Party's (Demokrat Parti - DP) initial bid to liberate radio in response to former restrictions of the CHP. At the time, the foundation of Hürriyet (owned by the Simavi family) and Milliyet (owned by the

Karacan family) in 1948 marked a new period in the development of “mass press” in Turkey. Together with Yunus Nadi’s Cumhuriyet, these dailies remained with their “traditional journalist owners” until the 1980s.

Even a superficial review of Turkish history reveals that both the DP and the military, after the 1960 coup d’état, utilized the radio for their own objectives and that the Turkish press was also under the pressure of political instabilities and economic problems faced during this period. Newspapers, despite being owned by journalist families, were dependent on the government to obtain advertising revenues and newsprint. Thus, a disguised control mechanism as such was the main obstacle to criticizing political power in an impartial manner. Newspapers that did not comply with the government were immediately sued, especially under the martial law of the DP era.⁹

The establishment of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu - TRT) as an “autonomous” public broadcaster marked a new period in Turkish media history, enabling a “real” relationship between media and politics in Turkey. Although the 1961 Constitution also provided a considerable amount of liberation to the press and the radio, TRT’s autonomous status, providing a place for opposition parties to explain their views, caused the government to feel uncomfortable about these regulations. After the 1971 military intervention, the status of TRT as “autonomous” was changed to “impartial” by a constitutional amendment, which might be interpreted in an arbitrary manner.¹⁰ Furthermore, subsequent regulations gave the government authority

⁹ For detailed information on the restrictions of DP era, see Akarcalı, 1997

¹⁰ In the 1961 Constitution, Article 121 (which stipulated that “the administration of broadcasting and televisions should be regulated by law as autonomous public corporate bodies”) was amended on 20 September 1971 and the structure of TRT was turned into an impartial public corporate body with Law No. 1568.

to appoint the director general of the public broadcaster, transforming it to an “apparatus of state”.

It is argued that the “autonomy” that returned to TRT in 1993 was “invalid in practice”.¹¹ (Gencel Bek, 2003: 252)

After another military coup d'état in 1980, with its indisputable damages to the development of a free press, single-party governance under Turgut Özal's Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi - ANAP) was a turning point in almost every area of Turkey's history. The efforts of ANAP to integrate the country into the global economic system also paved the way for a rapid development in the advertising sector, as well as a considerable increase of investments in the media market and in the circulation rates of newspapers.

Star1, co-owned by the son of then President Özal, declaring itself “Turkey's first private television channel”, started broadcasting from abroad in 1990 by satellite, despite the legal framework protecting public sector monopoly in TV and radio programming. This unexpected development, defined by Kaya as a “fait-accompli”, caused confusion and chaos since “there was no significant prior debate as to an eventual abolishment of the public monopoly”. (Kaya, 1994: 393)

After three years of confusion, caused by the delay of preparing a legal framework for this “fait-accompli”, the obstacles to private enterprises were removed with an amendment made in Article 133 of

¹¹ The constitutional amendment in 1993 to Article 133 bestowed “autonomy” on TRT, stipulating that “the unique radio and television administration established by the state as a public corporate body and the news agencies which receive aid from public corporate bodies shall be autonomous and their broadcasts shall be impartial”.

the Constitution on 10 July 1993.¹² Eventually, “traditional” media owners gave way to new entrepreneurs who had acquired capital in other fields.

Thus, by the 1990s a dual structure appeared in Turkey: private radio, television and newspaper organizations and TRT, which remained the sole public broadcaster the country, with its various channels and radio stations. As a conclusion to these developments, Turkish media, which had been characterized by a very high degree of concentration in ownership and political coverage, gradually became “sensational” at the expense of opinion papers and the local press. In other words, the pursuit of commercial interest required a new coverage where entertainment values took precedence.¹³

Furthermore, by the beginning of 2001, an amendment to the “Law on the Establishment and Broadcasting of Radio Stations and Television Channels” enabled media conglomerates to enter state tenders, conduct business on the stock exchange and to monopolize radio and television broadcasting. This was seen as a danger to media diversity and democracy in the country.¹⁴

¹² After the amendment, Article 133, Radio and Television Administrations and State-Financed News Agencies converted to: “Radio and television stations shall be established and administered freely in conformity with rules to be regulated by law. The unique radio and television administration established by the state as a public corporate body and the news agencies which receive aid from public corporate bodies shall be autonomous and their broadcasts shall be impartial”. (<http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/english/constitution.htm>)

¹³ According to Kaya, a sensation-inclined media can be observed in the entire world, nevertheless, in countries at the forefront of democratic development, the difference between idea-based journalism and leisure oriented TV channels or tabloid press is easily distinguishable. Whereas in Turkey, aside from a few exceptions, such a distinction is unspeakable. Kaya also stated that the distinction between hard news and editorial comment has virtually vanished. For further information on the transformation of media structures and the forces behind this change in global context see Kaya, 1994 and 1999.

Today in Turkey, there are around 3,450 periodicals (newspapers, magazines, etc.), nearly half of which are weeklies, and average sales of leading newspapers and magazines are declared to be nearly 3,5 million daily. As for broadcasting, there are 24 private television channels with nationwide broadcasts, along with 7 channels of the public broadcaster. The leading media groups acting in the market may be stated as Doğan, Sabah, İhlas, Akşam and Doğuş groups, with the highest market share being held by the Aydın Doğan's Doğan Media Group.¹⁵ Along with negative conclusions of the new ownership structure, many Turkish academics have argued that deficiencies of legal frameworks to regulate media functioning in Turkey are directly related to the prevailing strong state tradition.

Almost all scholars believe that the “limited” and “oppressive” political formation set up after the coup in 1980 still remains in its essence. According to Kaya, albeit significant quantitative developments that took place after 1980, the media fell short in providing a qualitative contribution to the democratization of society, the escalation of participation, and the improvement of societal diversity and pluralism. Media, with its current operation and discourse, has transformed from being an instrument of freely informing the citizens of the universe they live in, to an “insidious, shameless if need be, propaganda tool”. (Kaya, 1999)

It is even asserted that the establishment of the Turkish Republic was merely a transition from the “totalitarian” state structure to an “authoritarian” one and that in Turkey, radio and television broadcasting have always been under the direct control of the state. According to Kejanlıođlu, the authoritarian state tradition in Turkey

¹⁴ Despite President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's veto, the aforesaid amendment went into effect. For Sezer's justification see, http://www.belgenet.com/2001/rtuk_veto.html and for the amended law, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k4676.html>.

¹⁵ See <http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/kitaplar/turkey2005/>.

excluded public debate and the reason for this was “the successive amendments to the Constitution and laws by the military.” In this regard, legal regulations in the broadcasting field in Turkey are coerced only on “national security” grounds. According to her, the Constitution and Constitutional amendments as well as the ratification of new laws, are carried out by the military power itself or by the “democratic government” if the broadcasts constitute a drawback to the “national security policy”. Kejanlıoğlu also points out that broadcasting had never been a priority subject of regulation in Turkey; radio and television have functioned as instruments for the promulgation of government actions and operations as well as the manipulation and guidance of the public. (Kejanlıoğlu, 2004: 453, 201)

Likewise, according to Gencil Bek, broadcasting principles generally protected the state “...in broadcasting, mainly the content is inspected, chiefly by The Supreme Council of Radio and Television (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu-RTÜK) and that in this process mostly ‘the broadcasts against the state’ are penalized.” The author asserted that the flaws and violations brought about by market mechanisms, that is, the structural flaws of the communication industry, are not punished as much, and RTÜK lacks the efficiency in the protection of pluralism by fighting the concentrated media structure. (Gencil Bek, 2003: 251-252)

According to Tılıç, in the last decade the conversion of first page headlines with large characters from criticizing to supporting the government and vice versa has not eluded attentive readers. Moreover, these readers came to feel that the underlying motive of this conversion was related to the satisfaction of the media owners’ individual needs. Governments, on the other hand, perceived this as some sort of “carrot – stick” relationship enabling them to control the

media. Aside from anti-democratic laws, arrests and detentions, credit retrenchments or cut offs became an effective governmental measure against the media. As media owners had significant investments in other sectors as well, a close and keen auditing of these by fiscal inspectors turned out to be another effective “stick” policy. As for the “carrot” policy, authorizing media owners to use public bank loans might be given as an example. (Tılıç, 1998: 90)

In this respect, as Kaya also stated, “a continuous need for new credits and subsidies, the press is often inclined to moderate its stance vis a vis governments”. (Kaya, 1994)

Under these circumstances, journalists are given the role of serving public interests inspite of the will of powerful institutions and actors to control the information circulating in the public sphere. In this context, the development of journalism and journalists’ ways of struggling with these serious intervention attempts in the development of a free and independent media are also serious matters of concern in academic research. In the following section, the development of journalism in Turkey and journalists’ attempts to protect their profession against outside interventions will be touched on.

3.2 Journalism in Turkey

As reviewed in the previous section, Turkish media is faced with serious problems, mainly stemming from some peculiarities of the country’s political culture and tradition. It is obvious that the negative conclusions of new ownership structure, along with the heritage of former suppressive policies of political powers and the prevailing strong role of the state in society did not facilitate the attempts to develop a free media.

Under these circumstances, it is seen that the freedom of Turkish journalists is also limited and journalistic professionalism is not so strongly developed, due to some challenges that face Turkish media.

Included in a number of recent political, social and economic reforms made by Turkish governments to improve the country's chance of joining the European Union, some of the changes could be conceived of as having positive effects for journalists.¹⁶ However, the doubts about Turkey's commitment to democracy and human rights continue, along with other technical adjustment requirements.¹⁷

Apart from the concerns about freedom of expression and freedom of press, many journalism studies also indicate that Turkish journalists are working under harsh conditions, having no job security or social security as they are forced to work outside Law No. 212 and without permanent contracts. What is emphasized in these assessments is that the media workers who are expected to defend the public's rights are unable to defend their own rights. One of the most striking indicators of this situation is that during the economic crisis of 2001,

¹⁶ The new press law replaced prison sentences with heavy fines. The harshest penalties, such as shutting down a media outlet or banning newspaper printing or distribution, were also dropped. Protection of journalistic sources was even strengthened. Some journalists prosecuted for "complicity with terrorist organizations" were acquitted after the anti-terrorism law and the criminal code were amended in 2003.

¹⁷ In this respect, amendments to the 1991 Law on the Fight Against Terrorism (Act 3713) that were passed by the Parliament on 29 June 2006 were also criticized as introducing new restrictions on press freedom and imposing censorship on "sensitive or controversial issues in Turkish history". Furthermore, Paris based watchdog Reporters Without Borders, in its 2006 annual report, was one of those groups to assert that the country's new penal code (Türk Ceza Kanunu-TCK), which came into force on 1 June, 2005 "imposed new restrictions on journalists and the vagueness of some parts of it allowed judges to unfairly imprison them". Likewise, Amnesty International declared that "it was extremely concerned at the frequent use of Article 301 of the penal code to prosecute human rights defenders, journalists and other members of civil society peacefully expressing their dissenting opinion."

approximately 4000 media workers lost their jobs, later defined as a kind of “massacre of journalists”.¹⁸

As a matter of fact, Turkish journalism history shows that an awareness of this situation has destined media professionals to search for ways to protect their profession and to strengthen their position against several endogenous and exogenous pressures and interventions. In the early periods of the Turkish Republic, as in the late Ottoman period, newspapers were published by a group of intellectual figures, esteemed politicians, authors or poets working at the same time as journalists. The most striking feature of this period was that the journalists who were enjoying managerial positions at these newspapers were voluntarily involved in attempts to establish professional organizations. (Soner, 2003: 239-240)

In that time, journalists were also appreciated for their altruistic efforts to provide support for the establishment of democracy in Turkey. (Koloğlu, 2003: 30)

Unfortunately, this tradition was not maintained by successive managerial staffs. Although several journalists’ unions and communities were founded in the 1940s, it can be said that no serious steps were taken regarding the job security of journalists until the 1960s. The 1960 coup d’etat, although it fractured Turkey’s young democracy for a short period of time, can be defined as a “golden age” in terms of reinforcement of journalists’ rights. In the period, present press law, the product of former restrictive policies, was softened and Press Labor Law No. 212, which provided media workers some assurances against suppression attempts, was adopted. In the period, journalists could use their union rights, including collective agreement, along with other branches of

¹⁸ See Tılıç, 2001 for further evaluation of the consequences of the economic crisis

business. In 1963, journalists' unions in 5 cities unified under the Turkish Journalist Union (Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası-TGS). Institutions for professional education were also established during this period. However, beginning in 1975, as a conclusion of the deterioration of the social and political situation in Turkey, journalists gradually lost these rights. The function of Law No. 212 has been undermined by several methods and an inclination to subordinate journalists came into being. Furthermore, after the 1980 military intervention, this inclination found a legal base.

By the 1990s a gradual “de-unionization” process became apparent in the Turkish media system, as the new owners appealed to several methods to eliminate unionization of journalism. The influence of TGS has diminished due to the pressure of the media owners. Most media employees became cautious about union membership for fear of dismissal. According to Kaya, no profession in Turkey has encountered such desperation as journalism. Today, union journalist - save for some exceptions - means “unemployed journalist”, the unionization movement is being eliminated and “associationization” is spreading. Aside from the journalist communities, the number of associations founded according to different field of activities has massively increased. For Kaya, these associations strive to meet their members' extraprofessional individual hedonistic interests rather than the execution and moral principles of their profession. (Kaya, 1999:652)

Under these circumstances, the media worker who is not provided with a contract under Law No. 212 cannot obtain a press card and cannot become a member of TGS, which is the only trade union that has the authority to negotiate collective agreements for journalists.

Along with the efforts to ensure job security of journalists, establishing a self-regulation platform to determine a normative frame concerning “how true journalism should be” has always been on the agenda of media professionals. In this context, after more than 20 years of failed attempts to provide and maintain the efficacy of Turkey’s first self regulation platform, namely Basın Şeref Divanı between 1960-1967, the Turkish Press Council was established by 141 active journalists with the aim of "creating a freer and more respectable press”.

The two main duties of the press council are to monitor press freedom and activities against it and to prevent the public from possible damages that may originate from the way this freedom is used.

Following its establishment in 1986, efforts of the Press Council to point out the rights and obligations of journalists concluded with the generation of a text, composed of 16 articles and named "The Professional Principles of the Press".¹⁹

This document, emphasizing the will to struggle whenever and wherever necessary against all restrictions concerning freedom of communication generating from law makers or other organizations and persons, defines the freedom of communication as an instrument of the public's right to learn the truth. In case of any complaint about a journalist or a media institution, the Supreme Board of the Press Council may come to one of three different judgments. It may "reject the complaint", it may decide to "admonish" the journalists in question, or if there is heavy violation of professional principles it may declare that the concerned journalist or media institution is to be "censured". However, as Altun points out, sanctions as such may

¹⁹ For full text, see Appendix A

only harm the prestige of journalists and institutions, and it seems that prestige loss is not a concern for potential violators of professional principles. (Altun, 1995: 97-98)

The Turkish Journalists' Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities is another document adopted by the Turkish Journalists' Community (Türkiye Gazeteciler Cemiyeti - TGC). It has a more detailed content, including rights, responsibilities, basic duties, principles and a code of conduct of journalists.²⁰ In this text, it is emphasized that a journalist should use press freedom conscientiously and honestly, while fighting all kinds of censorship and self-censorship, as the responsibility of the journalist to the public supersedes all other responsibilities, including to employer and public authorities. According to the declaration, while observing due respect for the laws of the country, journalists should rebuff all interference from the government and similar official institutions. In this context, journalists cannot be compelled to defend an opinion that they do not share and they have the right to organize and to sign contracts individually to safeguard their moral and material interests.

Similar to universally recognized journalistic principles, here the emphasis is on respect for universal values of humanity, privacy, and confidentiality of the sources, and discrimination, purloin, slander, insult, distortion, manipulation, rumor, gossip and groundless accusations are defined as grave offences that media professionals must avoid. In this declaration, where it is stated that a journalist cannot seek material gains or moral advantages from the publication or by withholding a piece of information or news, the general frame of relationship with news sources is also given place. According to this, journalists are expected to consider professional principles as the main guide in forming and conducting their relations with sources.

²⁰ For full text, see Appendix B

In the declaration, Turkish journalists' code of conduct is also given place, pointing out the need for clear separation between news and commentary or news and advertisements, usage of photography and visual images, requirements of judicial reporting, news about minors, sexual assault, identity or health.

In this part, where it is stated that journalists should reject personal gifts and material benefits, they are also expected not to take part in activities not relevant to the policies of the media organization, either voluntarily or by compulsion, even though such activity maybe in the company's interest.

In this declaration, it is noted that the principles' primary basis for judgment is the journalists' own "conscience".

In recent years, some publishing bodies and newspapers in Turkey have declared their professional principles and created their own self-control mechanisms. The most significant of these seems to be the principles and the Publishing Council of Doğan Group Publishing Bodies. Doğan Media Group has developed the Publishing Council to function as a mechanism that would gather readers' complaints and finalize them. Another significant step in this perspective is the launching of the "Ombudsman" (Reader's Correspondent) in Hürriyet, which was initially introduced by Milliyet. This exercise gained efficiency through the efforts of Yavuz Baydar at Milliyet. Baydar, in his column "Reader's Correspondent", has been replying to readers' complaints once a week, responding to the subject within the framework of professional principles. These criticisms generally focus on the reporter who covered the news or the editorial board, whose opinions are also made available on the same page. A similar practice

has been launched at Hürriyet, titled “Letters to the Reader’s Correspondent”, in which readers’ complaints are published. (Demir, 2005)

From a general perspective, despite national disparities, it seems as if the professional principles adopted in liberal democracies are more or less effective and applicable in Turkey as well. Nevertheless, sanctioning mechanisms are hardly efficient. Therefore, portraying a framework on paper where journalistic practices are underlined, or declaring the rights, responsibilities and duties of journalists in detail might not prove to be very significant.

As has been recurrently evaluated in this chapter, the shaping of both media and journalism, as its constituent, directly depends on the peculiarities of the country in which they develop. After the general assessments of the previous two chapters, the next chapter will evaluate the results of interviews conducted with 14 journalists, in order to provide a more conclusive judgment on the factors shaping journalistic practices.

CHAPTER 4

THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM IN TURKEY AS TO THE VIEWS OF TURKISH PARLIAMENT JOURNALISTS

4.1 Methodology

As stated before, this study is mainly composed of journalists' evaluations of prevailing journalistic practices in Turkey. In this context, during the summer of 2003, in the 22nd legislative period, 14 parliament journalists²¹ (journalists, who worked as parliament

²¹ A parliament journalist is defined as the employee charged by a media institution to cover parliamentary activities, in the regulation issued by the Bureau of the Assembly of Turkish parliament. (TBMM) He/she is given an ID card by the Committee of Press Relations to ease his/her entry to TBMM compound. The only precondition for a Turkish journalist to deserve parliament journalist ID card is to have a "yellow press card" for at least 5 years. Yellow press cards are given to the journalists by the Directorate General of Press and Information, a governmental institution tied to the Prime Ministry, after they complete a certain time in profession. Parliament journalists are offered some privileges so as to ease their work; they can use every entrance of parliament buildings except the Honor Entrance located on the front facade of the main building and are allowed to watch open parliamentary hearings in the lodge devoted to them or via plasma televisions located just outside the meeting hall. On the condition they are given permission, parliament journalists can also watch committee and party group meetings. They utilize the parliament library, restaurant, hairdresser and parking lot. Parliament journalists are provided with offices in the main building where the general assembly meeting hall is located. The work and behavior of parliament journalists in TBMM are always kept under surveillance by a Chief of Administration, the Head of Press and Public Relations Department and the Head of the Board of Association of Parliament Journalists. (APJ) Chief of Administration may inform the APJ of journalists who harm the prestige of the parliament and may want these journalists to be warned. If journalist does not heed the warnings his/her ID card may be taken away. If journalists violate the security rules of the parliament it is not necessary for the Chief of Administration to inform APJ before taking his/her ID card.

journalists at some time in their careers or are still active) were interviewed. While selecting the interviewees, experience in the profession was considered as the main criterion. Thus, 10 of the interviewed 14 journalists were selected among the ones who had over 15 years of experience in journalism. Among them, the most experienced journalist had 40 years of experience.

In order to disclose the differences between the views of experienced journalists and ones who were at the beginning of their careers, 4 journalists with 8 to 12 years of professional experience were added to the interviewees' list.

Thus, 8 of the interviewed 14 journalists had 15 or more years experience in parliament journalism, and the most experienced among them worked for 25 years in this field. The rest of the journalists had 4 to 13 years of experience in the parliament.

Here it should be noted that, while selecting among interviewees, it was aimed to include journalists from different media institutions, with different ideological orientations. However, the effort to find journalists who defined themselves as "rightist" or "conservative" failed. Even the ones who claimed to be "conservatives" during preliminary conversations, declined to be defined as such and stated that they were "social democrats". Thus, the list of journalist interviewees included 8 "leftist", 2 "social democrat" journalists and a journalist who defined his ideological standpoint as "center-right". In this list, 2 journalists refrained from disclosing their political inclinations.

The ages of the interviewed parliament journalists were distributed as follows: 4 of them fell between 30-40, 8 between 40-50, and 2

between 50-60 years old. 3 of the interviewed 14 journalists were female and the rest were male.

Employment situation was also taken into account. At the time of the interview, 6 of the parliament journalists were unemployed and 2 of the 8 employed journalists were editors-in-chief. Here, unemployed journalists were considered able to supply more intimate information about the deficiencies of the media system and journalistic practices in Turkey. Among active journalists, 5 of the interviewees were working for newspapers, 1 of them was working for a news agency and 2 of them were working as editors-in-chief of TV channels.

Ideological orientation of the media institution was another characteristic of employed journalists. Among them 1 of the interviewees defined the ideological line of the media institution they worked for as “right wing”, 2 as “center-right”, 1 as “conservative”, 1 as “conservative right” and 1 as “liberal” while 2 of the employed journalists refrained from specifying a political line, but defined their institutions as “tabloid” and “objective”.

All of the interviewees were assured that their names would not be revealed in order to encourage them to speak more frankly. Thus, to identify the parliament journalists, the letter (J) was used. The characteristics of each journalist are displayed in Table 1 at the end of this section.

In each interview, the conversation was guided by asking specific questions in order to disclose parliament journalists’ perceptions and the follow-up questions provided further elaboration. They were asked to reveal their evaluations of the functioning of the media

system in general and the change in the media coverage of politics, the qualifications of parliament journalists, ideological factors that might influence the content of news, how they gathered information and how parliamentarians publicized their political messages, the nature of the relationship between parliament journalists and parliamentarians and its negative effects on objective reporting, the possible institutional pressures that journalists face and the journalists' and parliamentarians' pursuit of interest, and so on.

The interviews were recorded on tape cassettes and then these cassettes were decoded and transcribed. The manuscripts were then cut into pieces in accordance with similar categories. Finally, the titles emerged with regard to the responses of the interviewees to the main and follow up questions.

Table 1: Characteristics of Interviewed Parliament Journalists

Journalist Code	Sex	Age	Career Years in Journalism	Career Years in Parliament Journalism	Current Profess. Status	Org.	Ideology* Journalist	Ideology* Org.
J1	F	48	24	22	Unemp.	-	Left	-
J2	M	32	12	8	PJ	Newspaper	Left-	C.Right
J3	M	36	12	4	Unemp.	-	Left-	-
J4	M	50	27	25	PJ	Newspaper	-	Objective
J5	M	43	25	17	PJ	Newspaper	Left	Tabloid
J6	F	58	40	18	Unemp.	-	Left	-
J7	M	43	19	15	PJ	Agency	Left	Liberal
J8	M	50	18	18	Unemp.	-	Left	-
J9	M	46	23	10	Unemp.	-	Left	-
J10	M	55	29	24	Unemp.	-	Soc. Dem.	-
J11	F	33	8	5	PJ	Newspaper	Soc. Dem.	Right
J12	M	42	22	13	E.i.C	TV	Left	Cons. Right
J13	M	32	10	6	PJ	Newspaper	-	Cons.
J14	M	42	25	15	S.E	TV	C. Right	C. Right

Source: Processed from the data by the author

Abbreviations:

M = Male; F= Female; S.E = Senior Editor; E.i.C = Editor in Chief; PJ = Parliament Journalist; Soc. Dem. = Social Democrat; Cons. = Conservative; Cons.Right = Conservative Right; C.Right = Center-Right; Org.= Organization; Unemp.= Unemployed; Profess.= Professional; Org.= Organisation

** The categories used here are the interviewees' own definitions*

4.2 Media's Structural Transformation and Its Consequences

As stated before, Turkey's transition into a more information-based economy by the late 1980s and the early 1990s brought about a transformation of media structure that may be characterized by ownership concentration and sensationalist type of content. Without any doubt, this process has profound consequences for journalistic practices. In this context, interviewed Turkish journalists were asked several questions concerning how this change affected their daily routines in particular and the evolution of journalism as a profession in general.

It is seen that, regarding media's structural transformation, interviewed journalists point out the consequences of the new ownership structure, the inclination to a more sensationalist and elite oriented media content, which will be evaluated in the following pages.

4.2.1 New Ownership Structure

Asked to evaluate the general situation of media in Turkey, almost all the interviewed journalists pointed out that the new ownership structure, in which businessmen from various sectors had almost total control of the media market instead of the former "traditional" journalist owners, constituted a serious problem for the development of free press and independent journalism.

The common concern of the journalists was that the media had put aside its function to inform citizens in an impartial and objective manner, especially after the "grand transformation" process of the 1980s. In this respect, they claimed that due to the change in

ownership structure, media institutions were functioning as if they were the “private publications or broadcasters” of big companies that acted in various sectors, excluding both journalists’ rights and public interest.

In this context, it is mainly stressed that, along with a commercial logic involving the main concern to maximize economic interests, new media owners were in the pursuit of utilizing their media companies to further their political interests. According to J5, a veteran journalist working for one of the major newspapers for 25 years, the new owners tend to use their media as a “weapon” against political power holders. He stated that:

New owners use their media on behalf of their own economic and political interests. They reserve information that has a potential to undermine the interests of the political power and disclose it when necessary. In other words, they use media institutions as a missile launch and threaten other power circles by using this information as missiles.

Almost all the interviewees stated that the change in media ownership structure and its consequences had considerably negative impacts on their professional practices. Above all, they thought that under these circumstances it was impossible to be committed to basic journalistic principles such as objectivity and independence.

Thus it is obvious that, journalists feel obliged to comply with the wishes of their employers. Depending on their complaints, it can be said that the main concern of journalists in this respect is clearly the fear of being excluded from the market. Some of them even admitted that they preferred to comply with the wishes of their bosses in order

to not “fall into disfavor”, or were forced to obey their employers’ demands.

Asked about the roots of this problem, most of the experienced journalists criticized the deficiencies of the legal framework to regulate media ownership in Turkey. In this context, according to J4, “opportunity given to media owners to become the owner of other companies” created profound contradictions. He also pointed to the concrete consequences of this situation for journalists’ work and how it is reflected in news selection and construction process:

Assume that the owner of a media institution owns an insurance company concomitantly. In the case that he wants state railways to be insured by his company, he naturally should get along with the Minister of Transport to ensure this. Do you think that his journalist employees can make critical investigation or follow up the corruption cases about this ministry? No, they can not. Think that a plane crashes and the passengers of that airline company were all insured by the media owner’s insurance company. In this case, the media owner may force his employee to show the pilot as if he was drunk on board. Why? Because, he wants to be free of insurance payments. Let me give you another example: assume that your employer co-owns a mobile phone company such as TURKCELL or TELSİM. Do you think you can write an article about possible health risks of mobile phones? You certainly can not.

The same journalist also stressed that these circumstances “reduced” the role of the journalists to “advocate” the interests of media owners and particular political actors with whom they had close relationships. According to him:

Some news content may harm the interests of our bosses. Thus we are not given the permission to cover some sensitive issues. Employers may demand us to write “good things” about a political actor or on the contrary, to undermine the credibility of others. Thus, journalists are simply forced to play dirty tricks on behalf of their employers’ interests.

Regarding the suppressive attitude of the bosses, it was also claimed that journalists who “obeyed” the demands of their employers were “awarded” by promotion or increase in their salaries, while others who resisted these demands were “punished”. J13, a younger journalist reiterated the above stated criticisms and also noticed that such an order also implied a violation of the public’s right to know:

If RTÜK law paves the way for media owners to enter state tenders, the news that denounces this law can not find a place in newspapers and news bulletins. In the case that it is written and publicized, both the responsible journalist and his editors are somehow punished for this “mistake”. It is obvious that, in such a case, the public is misinformed and can not react to the unacceptable articles of that law.

It is striking to note that most of the journalists feel themselves obliged to harmonize with the current situation in the media environment rather than to strive for their rights. As derived from the answers, it can be said that most of them “pretend not to see” the faults of power holders who have close interest relations with the owner of the media institution she/he works for. In this regard, some of the young journalists stated that in time they generated “an intuition to foresee” which news was against the interests of the employers. 32 year-old J13 admitted that he did not find it

“reasonable” to write an article that had no chance of being published, while some experienced journalists defined this measure as “self-censorship”.

Thus, most of the journalists put that the ideal of “objective and impartial” reporting had been “absorbed” by a highly concentrated ownership structure where media professionals were simply forced to “internalize” the rules of the power holders. In this regard, J7’s statement seemed to summarize these views:

There is no “editorial independence” in news organizations. Journalists are looking for ways to enable their news to be published somehow. In the course of time, they unwillingly accept the rules of the game. They act with the fear of dismissal, avoid taking any risks and do not interrogate the deficiencies of the political system. Consequently, an inevitable degeneration process comes into being in our profession.

In sum, almost all the interviewed Turkish journalists admitted that, mainly due to their fear of dismissal, they can not follow the truth regardless of the consequences arising from it. As seen, journalists complain that they are forced or coerced to suppress some information under pressure from media owners. Depending on the interviewees’ statements, it can be argued that journalists in Turkey are directed to do things and express opinions that might be in contradiction with the principles of the profession. Consequently, it means that they have serious obstacles to showing full respect for the right of the public to know the truth.

As repeatedly stated before, it is the responsibility of the mass media to preclude the publication of editorial matter which is influenced by private or business interests. In this context, interviewed journalists’

criticism of the current situation in Turkish media system indicates that, within an ownership structure where there are serious problems regarding media regulation policies as such, the principle “respect for the truth and independent criticism” is violated.

Furthermore, journalists see the inclination towards more sensationalist political coverage as another consequence of media’s structural transformation in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a consequence which has considerable influence on their work.

As derived from the interviews, the shift towards sensationalist content was another matter of concern regarding the possible obstacles to reporting the events and issues “as they are”, in an objective, fair and balanced manner. In the following section, the influence of this inclination on the practice of journalism will be evaluated depending on the journalists’ own assessments.

4.2.2 Sensational News versus Informational News Content

Asked about the political coverage of the news organizations they worked for, almost all the interviewees affirmed that, in the last two decades, “sensational news” had taken the place of informational content and political news was given less time and space in the newscast.

In this regard, all of the journalists thought that sensational news was believed to attract the attention of audiences/readers. They also argued that sensational news had the “flexibility” to be used to “praise” or “harm” various actors and institutions that media owners wanted to influence.

In this context, some of the interviewees affirmed that in the Western world tabloids survived along with broadsheet quality newspapers, though in Turkey both kinds of content might be seen in the same publication. J7, working in the Ankara bureau of a foreign news agency stated that it was impossible to see a “bikini girl picture” in a Western quality newspaper, as it is in the last pages of each daily in Turkey.

Some of the experienced journalists also reminded that, in the past, newspapers had at least one page devoted to “parliament news”, but today all journalists are faced with the difficulty of publishing stories, partly because of time and space limitations. J5, working for a major newspaper for 25 years, explained this by a somewhat exaggerated assertion that, “with political news that was being chucked out, 5 more newspapers might be published daily”.

It seems that as an inevitable outcome of the changing scope of political coverage, there is a distinction between “the news that was published” and “the ones that were chucked out”. In other words, it is obvious that the main concern of journalists who do not want to “fall into disfavor” or “be wiped away from the market” is that their news be published.

According to J7, such concerns caused journalists to change the shape and content of news, taking the requirements of political coverage into account, and he asserted that this directly influenced the objectivity of news makers in a negative manner.

Almost all the interviewed journalists, even the veteran ones, complained that they were being oriented towards or even forced to make “sensational” news by their employers. J8, a 50 year-old journalist that had just resigned and began working as a press

counselor of a non-governmental organization, said that while he was working as a parliament journalist for a television channel his employer had forced him to cover the story of a woman parliamentarian's rapid weight loss.

J9, with his 23 years of experience in journalism, claimed that the inclination towards "tabloid journalism" started with the flourishing of "commercial" television channels. He and some other interviewed journalists complained that, especially after Reha Muhtar's²² "sensationalized" news got the highest ratings, almost all editors demanded their journalists make a similar kind of news. It should also be noted that most of the journalists complained about their editors' continuous demands to write news about "high salaries of parliamentarians" and "cheapness of the meals in the restaurant frequented by parliamentarians in the parliament campus".

J13, a young journalist who had only 6 years of experience as a parliament journalist, stated that journalists developed some personal strategies in order to survive under such conditions. He disclosed that a kind of "intuition" was developed by news makers to predict which news could be given place in the coverage. According to him, journalists use some "tricks of distortion or alteration" in order to ensure their news be published. He explained these efforts as such:

In time, we can predict which news will be found worthy to be published. A kind of journalistic intuition comes into being.

²² Reha Muhtar was first seen on TV as TRT's reporter from Athens. Later he hosted a debate program "Ateş Hattı" for the same channel. He then signed to a private channel Show TV as an anchorman where he gained national fame due to his chaotic, no-border news making, remarks and most importantly the bizarre questions he asked his guests.

Headlines are sometimes formed by the distortion of a selected element in the entire news text, even if it does not reflect the essence of the issue you cover. Sometimes you use this distorted information as the headline in order to ensure your news to be published.

In this regard, statements of journalists also indicated a differentiation between “routine news” and “enterprise news” in the political coverage. Almost all the interviewed journalists seemed to be convinced that “routine news, including information about commission meetings and plenary sessions of the assembly and press conferences, was indeed not newsworthy.” According to them, “the true journalism was to reveal information hidden behind the doors”. According to J1, this is directly related to the “nontransparent structure of the State in Turkey”:

Which press conference reflects accuracy? How many politicians are honest? They either lie or say nothing instead. They just tell their fictions in TV programs. It is directly related to the structure of the State that is not transparent in its essence. A journalist who confines himself to the routine news turns into a clerk to keep the minutes of meetings. We have to reach to the reality and fulfill the journalistic obligation to inspect political activities.

J8 supported this assessment simply by saying that, “the smaller the difference between public statements and debates behind the doors, the easier the work of parliament journalists”. According to J4, the information gathered from the plenary sessions, commission meetings and press conferences was only the “raw material” of news and should be enriched. He also argued that the quality of “exclusive

news” was dependent on the creativity, skills and strength of relations with the sources. J4, considering that “exclusive news” was rather more important than “routine” news, believed that journalists should not be smothered with the latter.

J2, a young journalist who had been a parliament journalist for 8 years, asserted that the circulation rates of newspapers were also connected with the amount of exclusive news. Taking that into account, journalists fear to be discharged regarding this issue as well; J2 claimed that “if journalists could not come up with a fresh headline within 8-10 days, they would be discharged”.

Briefly, it seems that, with the aim of reaching to high circulation rates and ratings, journalists are unable to cover political issues comprehensively. Under competition pressure, they find themselves in search of “exclusive” or “sensational” news, leaving aside important developments otherwise considered as “routine”. In some cases, this may be considered as a violation of the journalistic principle of protecting the private life of citizens (including news sources) and the right to observe and research all phenomena that affect public life.

In the context of the consequences of media’s structural transformation, another deficiency of the Turkish media was indicated by journalists as the changing scope of the target audience in a way that is contrary to public interests, which will be evaluated in the following section.

4.2.3 Changing Scope of the Target Audience: Towards an Elite Oriented Media

The potential influence of media on citizens' choices and political processes is a prominent matter of concern in media studies. Asked about the scope of political influence of media in Turkey, most of the journalists, especially the more experienced ones, claimed that political news arouses the interest of economic and political power holders, but not of the general public.

Among them, a few argued that the media had lost its "advantage" to influence citizens' political choices. J1, an experienced journalist who had recently resigned owing to a disagreement with her superiors, put the whole blame on media for this "misusage":

Formerly, all political news had the chance to be influential on people's ways of thinking. Now the media lost this advantage. The media so misused this advantage that, in the end it also lost its ability to orientate people's political choices. The media could not see the coming of MHP²³ as the second party in recent elections. Or it foresaw this but preferred not to disclose this prediction. If it was so, it means that, the electorate was not influenced by these efforts and voted for that party.

J7, another experienced parliament journalist who worked for various newspapers and periodicals since 1988, supported this assessment. According to him, "Political leaders that were supported by media could not come to power in recent elections and this clearly showed that the media had lost its opportunity to influence citizens' political choices".

²³ At 1999 general elections, The Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-MHP) came the second party with about 18 % of the national vote, highest in its history.

The interviewees also pointed out that, circulation rates of newspapers were considerably low in Turkey. In this respect, 55 year-old veteran journalist J10 suggested that “the people punished the newspapers, due to their distancing from readers in every sense”

However, almost all the interviewed journalists who believed that “the media had lost its credibility in the eyes of the people” claimed that, on the contrary, media influence on political life was considerably high. J6, depending on her 40 years of experience in the profession stated that, “In Turkey the fate of the power holders and which party would come to the power were determined by newspapers, especially by Hürriyet Daily for long years”.

J5, another experienced journalist, argued that it was media owners’ “preference” to be more influential on a small group including political and economic actors rather than addressing a large scale of “ordinary citizens”. He said that:

Only a few media tycoons dominate the whole market who does not care about public interests but maximizing their own profits. They use their media as an instrument of threat against the state, legislative, executive and even judicial bodies. Turkey’s population is almost 70 million, and only 3 million newspapers are sold daily. What media moguls consider important is not the quantity but the quality of the readers.

While experienced journalists tended to make criticisms about the ongoing situation, younger ones seemed more concerned with finding ways to survive under these circumstances. 32 year-old J13 disclosed that “they wrote some of the news for the public and some of the news for the parliament”, adding that the latter group might “provoke

a debate among the members of a political party, render the ongoing debates deeper or even imply some changes in bills”.

Likewise, according to J2, another young journalist in his fourth year as a parliament journalist, “The recipients of the news about the Prime Minister’s controversy with the members of his party were not the ordinary citizens but the news sources themselves”. He also noted that, “political news might be so effective that, it could trigger the closing down of a political party²⁴, but only if the owner of the media institution wanted it to be so”.

As has been seen, “The media’s functioning as an inter-elite communicator” was one of the most criticized aspects of the Turkish media system. J7 pointed out that news that aroused the interests of citizens was also given place in the political coverage, but the “interests of economic and political actors always had the priority in this order”. According to him:

Newspapers are transformed into arenas of debate and consensus among elite groups. A newspaper supporting the government may pretend not to see the statements of the military or it may do the reverse in the case that it has conflicts of interest with government.

Almost all the interviewed journalists also thought that media owners were in the pursuit of gaining political power, along with their primary objective of economic interest maximization. According to

²⁴ The pro-Islamic law statements of Halil Ibrahim Çelik, Welfare Party (Refah Partisi - RP) Deputy for Şanlıurfa, which he made in the parliament lobby, hit the headlines in May 1977. His words, “Democracy will come by bloodshed” were first reported by Günseli Önal, a parliament journalist working for Milliyet. The statements of Çelik set the Constitutional Court into action and triggered the process of closing down of WP in a decision made on January 16, 1998. By this decision, 5 members of the party, including Çelik, were sentenced to a 5 year ban from politics.

J10, “the media, being well aware of politicians’ dependence on newspapers and television channels in order to reach to a large scale of recipients, tried to dominate political processes taking advantage of this awareness”.

These statements indicate that journalists were highly critical of media’s losing its credibility in the eyes of the public. Some even stated that the underlying cause of low newspaper circulations was media’s “misusage” of its “advantage” to influence the political opinions of large scale of citizens.

Central to the journalists’ criticism was the tendency of media bosses and media professionals to exclude the public’s expectancies and right to know. Depending on the interviews, it can be argued that the media in Turkey distances itself of its function of informing the public and rather transforms into a communication field of elite circles. This situation, without a doubt, influences journalists’ work.

These assertions also lead to a conclusion that media and its practitioners in Turkey are highly involved in political life and its conflicts, a conclusion which will be examined in the following sections.

4.3 Journalists’ Enduring Quandary: political involvement or neutrality?

A journalist, as any other citizen, has the right to a political or other attitude and commitment. However, as also stated in universally agreed codes of conduct, s/he should keep professional distance from actual events in her/his work and this is conceived as one of the conditions for neutral reporting about events.

As stated in the first part of this study, the phrase “political parallelism” refers to the strength of connections between the media and the political actors and the balance between the advocacy and the neutral/informational traditions of journalism. In this regard, political parallelism is predominantly affiliated with the role orientations and practices of journalists.

Considering political neutrality as one of the universally recognized principles of the profession, whether journalists are committed to it should be examined comprehensively within the evaluation of journalistic practices and their compatibility with the democratic role of the media. As the main task of journalists is to provide society with true and verified information, the most important ethical principle which journalists should follow is the principle of objectivity, which in the following pages will be evaluated with a special emphasis on journalists’ perception of this basic principle.

4.3.1 “Objectivity”

As is universally recognized, a journalist should always establish a clear and unmistakable distinction between the facts which he/she tells and opinions, interpretations or surmises. In this regard, as underlined in the previous sections, objectivity is conceived as one of the most indispensable principles of journalism. Thus, it is suggested that journalists’ commitment to this principle is to a great extent related with how their individual political views, the relations they establish with political actors and the ideological line of the media institution affect their work. In this respect, how media professionals conceive and define this principle should be questioned before all else. Answers to questions concerning these possible influences on the news production process and journalists’ perception of “political

neutrality” have shown that most of the journalists do not share a common definition of “objectivity”.

Some of the interviewees asserted that objectivity was “reporting the event the way it was, as if the journalist was merely a copper wire”, while others defined it as “the opposite of being partial”. In this regard, all of the journalists agreed that they were totally against “being partial”. As for “journalists functioning as a copper wire”, different viewpoints emerged.

Some interviewees, pointing to the difference between “taking sides” and “being partial”, revealed that journalists have political views, orientations and beliefs as well, yet it is possible to not reflect it in the coverage. “Left viewed” J1, who spent 22 years of her 24 year career in the parliament, underlined that the journalist’s individual viewpoint should not be reflected on his/her coverage, yet that “politics was shaped upon some ideologies, some individuals’ behaviors and tendencies, and that a journalist amongst and observing politics should definitely have a ‘stance.’”

J4, asserting that the essential point was how much of this ‘stance’ was reflected in the coverage, noted that a journalist revealing his/her own political affiliations in the coverage will become a “propagandist” and that this could be sensed by all others.

Some of the interviewees pointed out that “commentary” was the duty of columnists and that the function of journalists should be to report what happened in its essence, functioning as a “copper wire”. The statements of experienced journalist J5 seemed to summarize these views:

A journalist, no matter what his/her viewpoint, has to report the event as it is. A left wing author or a pro-religious one includes his/her views, but everyone knows what he/she stands for. A political journalist, on the other hand, whether leftist or rightist, can not look from his/her own perspective. If he/she does so and this eludes the editor or this view point is maintained on purpose, then there is a ?deformation?. A journalist has to be a copper wire to an extent. I have worked as an editor for 10 years. If I find out that someone who covers the activities of the leader of CHP, Deniz Baykal, starts to think like him, then I will no longer have faith in this journalist.

Whereas other interviewees pointed out that they did not consider defining a political journalist as a “copper wire” when speaking of objectivity. J4 exposed that he did not perceive “covering the news as it is” as a requisite of objectivity:

Do you know that normal is undefined? Its definition changes according to time, place and culture. So does objectivity. A journalist has to decorate and garnish the coverage. But if you report a law as it is, no one will understand. You have to cover the underlying motives of why that law is passed, who is protected and looked after, who will benefit in the future, etc.

J7 also objected to the idea of “reporting the event as it was” detaching it from the “objectivity” criteria:

The mistake that is being made in the recent period is functioning as a “copper wire”, that is “tape recorder

journalism”. You record the statement and write it exactly. As a journalist, whether you are there or not hardly matters. Do you serve your guests the fruit you got from the market? You first chose and pick the best and then you serve it.

In this context, it has been observed that most journalists perceived “analysis” and “commentary” as one, and that these are different from “subjectivity and partiality”.

J12, who has served as a parliament journalist for many years, argued that one can include his/her own comments in the coverage, provided that they are specifically exposed:

I believe that there is no objective journalist. Everyone takes sides. They already take sides as individuals. There is a difference between taking sides and being partial. There is an actual event; you can interpret it with your own viewpoint. But while you interpret it, you have to convey the event as well. Once you convey it, you add that there is such an event and this is my viewpoint, this is how I interpret it.

J11, a young journalist who declared her political viewpoint as “social democrat”, asserted that it is sometimes inevitable and necessary to “comment”, based on what she attributed to the meaning of “commentary”:

Sometimes an exclusive report becomes a comment. Aside from the daily flow of routine news, this is used for giving a direction to the flow of events by making connections with other things. I believe that exclusive news requires some commenting.

Because you cover the event on your own. A comment is already included inevitably.

Up until here, journalists approached the subject from a more theoretical perspective, though within a certain degree of confusion of definitions. Whereas J7, defining himself as “leftist”, brought about a totally different perspective. Claiming that a journalist could not be totally objective, he emphasized that commentary might have different dimensions and that the comment reflected in the coverage might also be in a character exposing the political line of the institution he/she works for, rather than his/her own viewpoint.

Nowadays, commenting journalists began to emerge, especially on TV. The news source is being disregarded; there is no way to find it in the coverage. He/she exposes what the news stands for, actually displaying the political perception of the media institution he/she works for. This is defective.

Most of the journalists corroborated with J7 who claimed that “political journalists were simply ineffective gears in the process that merely assisted in the turning of the wheel”, asserting that the shape and the content of the news was determined predominantly by the general policy of the institution they worked for. 36 year-old J3 asserted that a journalist can approach news only as “partial” as the policy of the newspaper. J2, claiming a “leftist” view point but working for a right wing institution, agreed that the main framework was determined by the institution:

Since I do not reflect my view points to my news, I do not encounter any problems. The institution knows this anyhow. Yet there are some circumstances where the institution is sensitive. Under such circumstances, I am required to work in line with their desires. This institution, for instance, feels close to Party A. It mostly covers this party's events. The framework is already set, so you act accordingly.

Likewise J2, who served 8 years of his 12 year career as a parliament journalist, claimed that the political affiliation of the journalist and his/her source did not affect the coverage, and underlined that he had to remain in line with the "general line of the newspaper" he works for, at the expense of the reactions of his sources who shared his political viewpoints:

You enter into a party. Parties in Turkey are like homes. You become guests. You make very nice dialogues with some politicians. With some, you fight. In this process, friendship develops. You may be affected by their ideas and achievements, yet you make your news the way your employer wants it to be. I worked for a right wing newspaper and covered left wing parties. Whereas the institution I worked for had a stance against leftist understanding. In this regard, complications may happen.

As can be observed from these answers, the political stances of journalists and their proximity to political parties only affects the coverage to the extent that it corresponds with the political line of the institution. Nevertheless, it is claimed that the political affiliations of journalists become an effective element in the recruitment process, which will be elaborated later on in this study.

4.3.2 Journalists and Their Political Affiliations

As mentioned repeatedly, a journalist, as a citizen, has an ideological orientation and the right to support a political party. Yet, regarding his/her position within the political sphere, s/he may also develop affinities with political groups and actors. Whether these affiliations are reflected in news content and selection is a matter of dispute, as s/he is expected to report political information in a way that is free of any subjectivity, in order to give voice to a plurality of viewpoints in a balanced and fair manner. In other words, it is thought that it would be difficult for a journalist to independently and fairly criticize political activities if s/he feels herself/himself as an insider of the political sphere and becomes a part, advocator or sympathizer of certain political views.

In this context, it is generally presumed that the tendency of journalists to be active in political life constitutes a considerable threat since such an inclination may make journalists to distance themselves from the public. Here, “where journalists see themselves in the wider processes of social and political communication” is considered an important component of journalistic practices, as it is believed that perceptions determine attitudes and behaviors.

Asked “whether they felt themselves as effective actors in the political processes”, most of the journalists disclosed that they felt some “sense of power” being in a position that is very close to the political power holders. In this context, here it is striking to note that almost all the journalists emphasized parliament journalism’s being the “highest position to be achieved” in the profession and that “the subsequent phase could only be executive positions”.

J3, who believes that journalists acquire a feeling of “power” feeling once they take hold of such a position, “one that they can now ask the premier to account for something where once they were incapable of even asking questions”. According to him, “Journalists have powerful egos and no journalist would settle his/her professional ideal with parliamentary journalism. They would only use it to achieve better positions.”

J11, who served as a financial journalist for 3 years and 5 as a parliament journalist, touched upon a different dimension of the issue. She claimed that journalists who cover politics for a long time come to feel like an “insider” after a while, and that this might pose a threat to the objectivity of the coverage:

I was never a person of politics. But at the end of five years, I came to think that one day I might become an MP. You are there from the morning to the evening. You can see and observe the structure much better. Once you see that some things might have been achieved but they were not, I guess this develops into a reaction. You begin to say that I would have done this or that, had I been in there. Periods end, MP’s leave, new ones come, but you are still there. Newcomers can not see some things. You witness the procedure very closely. In a way, this is the pulse of Turkey. You know the problems, the potential solutions. After a while, I find myself asking whether I am looking from the MPs’ perspectives. Once the procedure, the rules or activities come to be criticized, you find yourself in need of saying “it is not like that, but like this”. On issues like salaries or the cheapness of meals, for instance... Even identification might happen. Especially if the political viewpoint of the journalist overlaps with that of the political party, it

might even become dangerous. Especially if the party he/she covers becomes the one that s/he votes for.

J1 stated that from time to time she felt “emotional” affinity to the political parties and figures she covered and that these groups even offered her to stand for MP elections. She asserted that it was more of a “necessity” than a preference for a parliament journalist to become a major political actor. J1’s statements summarize most of the journalists’ assessments in this regard:

A journalist can sometimes be very effective and determining. A journalist is a very important source of information from the politician’s perspective. If the MP is wise enough, he/she may obtain information from the journalist. Since without the press, there would not be politicians. The parliament journalist is a major political actor, because in every election the parliament changes to a great extent. We, on the other hand, know the internal functioning and the private rules of the parliament much better. We know better the party that an MP is affiliated than the MP. An MP always starts from behind. This is the nature of it, and so should it be.

Another important issue the interviewees pointed to was that, in the current environment, where power struggles in media and politics forestall the public interest, the journalists’ political affiliation becomes a key criterion in the recruitment process.

Most of the interviewees asserted that journalists who supported and established close relations with the party in power are more and more

popular. “Leftist” J2, who was working in a “right-wing” media organization, claimed that:

The preference of journalists in the employment process varies according to the parties in power. Today, CHP journalists are not popular, since their bosses do not need CHP. AKP journalists are more in demand, those who can establish the right connections with that party. Like parties, journalists are chosen according to the current situation.

J3 stated that “not only for his/her boss’s interest, but a journalist working in a newspaper has good relations with AKP. A major newspaper will thus employ him/her.” J9 asserted that “some friends who have close ties to AKP acquired value, friends whose stances tend towards Islam. All newspapers gave employment to one or two of these people.”

Some journalists, contrary to previous assertions, claimed that left-wing inclined journalists are a majority in the press. J10 expressed that he did not know why there were so many journalists with leftist viewpoints in newspapers with rightist tendencies, but that the fact actually remained so. J3 gave a more detailed evaluation:

Parliament journalists are people with left viewpoints in majority. Most or almost all of those who work for Milliyet, Hürriyet and Sabah, which are closer to the center-right, are social democrats or have left tendencies. Newspapers generally have blocs in the ideological sense; they often will not employ journalists with rightist views. Political stance is a key criterion in employment. The conservative press is not very powerful in

Turkey. 65 percent of the people are rightists, where 90 percent of journalists are leftists.

Another important aspect journalists pointed to was that after a while many political journalists enroll in the electorate register of the party they used to cover and become MPs. Journalists claimed that such examples, which they referred to as the most concrete indication of “a journalist identifying him/herself with a political party” were quite numerous. J3 alleged that some journalists achieved this by using “their positions as journalists”:

Journalists generally become the sympathizers, and after a while, the spokespersons of the political party they cover. Journalists are people with strong egos. Their main objective is usually to assume a managerial positions or to become an author. Journalists’ efforts to be elected as MPs by enrolling to the electorate register of a party they used to cover are a clear indication of this.

J12, supporting J3’s statements, explained why he finds it unethical for journalists to try to become MPs by using their positions:

The most significant indication of identification is journalists who became MPs. That is, when examined, it will be observed that in their previous careers they most certainly have covered the political parties they are now affiliated with as MPs. They established their relations and then exploited these to become MPs. This is not ethical behavior. In a way, this is the prize they received for their previous “partial” coverage. In this parliament, there are 3 or 4 journalists that I know of who

became MPs due to these relations. There always were, there are today, and there always will be.

Interviewees' statements revealed that in Turkey most of the media institutions had a particular "line" or "stance", be it stable or changeable as to the daily interests of the owner. In this context, journalists complain that they are "coerced" to be in line with the general framework of the media institution. Nevertheless, most of the journalists, who were well aware of the "limitations of employers' demands" on how to make the news, still had some individual aspirations to be "active" in information formation, rather than functioning as a "copper wire".

A tendency towards "commentary" was obvious in journalists' statements, though the "commentary" was often demanded to be in line with the institution's political orientations, not with the journalists' own ideological viewpoints. In this context, it is seen that journalists' perception of "objectivity", "political neutrality" or "commentary" differed. According to the interviewees, the tendency of journalists to be active in political life is evidenced best by the considerable number of journalists who have attempted to become politicians. Statements also verify that some journalists have some "sense of power" being "in heart of the politics" and have close ties with some particular political parties, which some think may carry them into active politics. According to the statements of the interviewees, this tendency of journalists to be active is also manifested in their becoming "sympathizers" or "spokesmen" of particular political groups. Moreover, journalists' political affiliations being a key criterion in the recruitment process also discloses the intense relationship of journalists and the political groups promoted by their employers.

4.4 Journalists and News Sources

With due respect to diversity of opinions, the journalist has to present as many as possible opinions of impartial individuals and should assess their information in a critical way, scrutinize facts with due diligence on the grounds of at least several sources. Thus, as stated before, the structure of the relationship between journalists and the sources from which they received first hand information regarding the political issues covered is seen as an important dimension of journalistic professionalism.

Asked about the structure of this relationship, interviewees pointed out that it was necessary to distance oneself from one's sources to some extent, and that an intimate relationship between a journalist and a politician might pave the way for a negative influence on the objectivity of the coverage. J4, a journalist for 27 years, summarized these views best, as follows:

Journalists' obligation to distance themselves from politicians resembles the position of porcupines in winter time; these animals have to cuddle into each other to protect themselves from the cold, yet still have to preserve a distance so that they refrain from stinging each other. You have to be very close, yet still have to leave a distance so as not to annoy your contact. This is vital for the credibility of the news.

Interviewees supporting J4's views asserted that a journalist should refrain from "befriending" his /her sources and that the relationship which is inevitably established is very different than the emotional bond between two people.

J12's simple example exposed that the relationship between a journalist and a politician was far from being based on "humanly mutual emotions", and was rather more "a relation of mutual interest":

Suppose that a journalist and an MP go out to dinner. If the MP pays for it, this might someday turn back and mean "I offered you dinner, now you owe me and must make this or that news."

As seen, most of the journalists acknowledged that a journalist and a politician may never become friends in the real sense, and that this was some sort of a "temporary relation steering according to interests". Claiming that without establishing a close and sincere relation a journalist could not obtain news, hence the proximity of relations was essential, J3 asserted that basically both parties had the tendency to "use" each other. Another issue most of the interviewees pointed to was that when journalists, covering a party or its sub-fractions, develop a close relationship in a manner deviating from professional norms, they would soon lose credibility in the eyes of their sources as well.

The interviewees drew attention to the fact that when journalists develop close relations with their sources, they at some point, begin to overlook a newsworthy issues or ignore them on purpose.

J13 mentioned that the deterioration of the journalist-politician relationship was caused by politicians trying to control the flow of information and that, as a result, the journalist sometimes unconsciously became a kind of "spokesperson" for the politician,

diverging from objectivity. In this context, J13 exposed the problem of “concealing information”, defining it as a habit arising from state traditions in Turkey as such:

The danger emerges from the perception in Turkey that information is “sacred”, hence its concealment. Some special news is obtained from meetings that should have been convened openly. In self-criticism, no one would report information that would hurt their well ?breeding? sources. If there is a negative aspect related to the source at some point, they would try to ignore it. They would report less of the negative and more of the positive. They will advocate for their sources, thus the sources will approach them in a more favorable manner. But when this leads to advocating for your source, try to save them face and become their spokesperson, this becomes dangerous. A parliament journalist, who worked in the parliament for long years, will soon become blind, start to ignore negativities. At this point, they start to restrain the public’s right to information. Some parliamentarians believe that the journalist’s only task is to report what he/she is given. Accordingly, lobbying should be prohibited, a fight in the plenary meeting should not be covered, etc. I believe that a committee where legislative activities are carried out can not be held behind closed doors. Parliamentarians may not have anything to hide from the public. The easier journalists acquire news, the more independent they would be.

Experienced journalist J10, touching upon a different aspect of the subject, stated that journalists might sometimes conceal a newsworthy issue from their bosses in order to protect their sources. Some interviewees on the other hand mentioned that they took into

account their own individual criteria when deciding whether or not to hurt their sources. J2 stated that the news should definitely be reported if there is a “crime” element involved, yet that the journalists were not totally independent in deciding which ones should be reported, and that they might have to account for those they concealed - in order not to offend their sources - to their superiors:

You then start to question your conscience. Is this news worthy enough to offend your friendship? Is it a mistake, or a crime? If it is a crime and you can not clear your conscience, you write it. So long for friendship. If there is no crime involved, I would rather prefer my friendships. Then there is also another dimension, when you renounce covering, you might have to account for it.

While young journalist J2 defined his own criteria as the element of “crime”, experienced J6 and J14 asserted that their criteria was “the distinction between private life and public interest”; accordingly, if the news is related to public interest, it should definitely be covered.

The interviewees claimed that at a certain point, the considerably personal relationship between a journalist and a politician could not totally be exempted from institutional interests. According to J4, “advocating a politician who has close ties to your boss becomes some sort of duty”, whereas J12 claimed witnessing “some situations where the journalist and the politicians wrote the news together.” J6, on the other hand, exposed how the close relationship between a journalist and a politician could deteriorate when financial interests got involved as such:

...And there are dictation journalists. They are employed since the bosses feed their newspapers from industrialists. They make them give advertisements. Industrialists also give money to political parties. Hence they are efficient. They can tell what they want you to write or not. And these people have their own men on salary. These journalists get money from both ways.

What the journalists stated on their professional practice exposed that some political actors tended to use the media, and thus the journalists, on behalf of their own interests. Journalists perceived this “instrumentalization” of media by the politicians as politicians’ efforts to control the information circulating in the political sphere.

According to the interviewees, the reason why politicians often pursue a policy of misinformation was that media was transforming into a communication, debate and consensus field of political and economic power circles rather than an instrument for informing the public, as mentioned in previous sections. Politicians may choose this deceptive policy so as to achieve the power and authority they need, to “ingratiate” themselves with their leaders and to “damage” their rivals’ reputations, aside from just attaining public support. While almost all journalists complained about this problem, J5 explained these initiatives with the following example:

Some news sources are malicious. They mislead you on purpose. There is a minister in the cabinet that your source dislikes, for instance. He might claim that this minister argued with Mr. Tayyip very harshly, called him with vulgar names, etc. Whereas this is merely manipulation.

While J3 acknowledged that “politicians who want to wear each other down misled journalists and gave disinformation”, J12 stated that “some politicians may pretend to have participated in a meeting although they did not, so as to become more popular, to be recognized and give the impression of being hard-working.”

According to experienced journalists, they must master their knowledge of the field and check the news so as to overcome these initiatives of disinformation and deception. Just the same, J7 asserted that this environment of insecurity leads a journalist in a way to work in “paranoia”:

It is possible for me to say that MPs intend to mislead us. When you have sufficient knowledge in the field you become aware of these intentions. If there is a press conference, you do not have to check it out. But when you receive information on a closed meeting, you have to confirm it from 2 or 3 different sources. Nevertheless, sometimes the journalists’ task is difficult. A politician may “leak” information to you saying that no one else knows about it. You can not confirm it, you also can not ignore it. Actually neither the politician nor the journalist acts sincerely. The politician will account you the way it serves him/her best. He/she might have been beaten inside, whereas would argue just the contrary once outside. In a sense, you live a slight “paranoia”. You have to be responsible towards the public, yet you have to live on and survive in the system.

Some journalists revealed that these efforts intensified even more after the Özal period. They claim that the sort of relationship Özal established with the journalists came to be embraced by subsequent

politicians. They pointed out that Özal was “attaching journalists to himself indebted” and controlled the flow of information accordingly.

While J5 asserted that Özal brought only “his own” journalists on domestic and foreign trips, J3 revealed how Özal “openly” made journalists “indebted to and dependent on himself”. The story, recounted by J3 and acknowledged by some other journalists, progressed as follows:

Özal presented cameras as a gift to the journalists who covered him, as a small gesture. When the bodyguards at some point somewhat ill-treated the journalists, they put down their cameras for the purpose of protesting. Özal turned to his wife and called out loudly “Semra, are not those our cameras?”

Although not totally falling within the scope of instrumentalization, which means the using of media by outside actors, journalists pointed out their exploitation, especially on behalf of their bosses’ economic interests and in an extraprofessional manner. Journalists might sometimes become intermediaries between their bosses and politicians responsible for economic affairs such as fixing appointments or pursuing bids. This issue will be elaborated further in the “Degeneration in the Profession” section.

4.5 Job Security and Journalists’ Unions

Perceptions regarding the lack of occupational safety of journalists as being the major element restraining the development of journalism had been revealed in previous sections. The interviewees as well, while responding to almost all questions concerning their practice, uttered repeatedly that “the fear of losing their jobs” was the main reason why the professional problems they confronted remained

unsolved. Accordingly, they claimed that journalists who could not resist the pressures of media executives would be unable to respect the public's right to know, and that this concern increased even more with the transformation of the media ownership structure and monopolization.

Most of the interviewees believed that enabling the media to assume the role of a fearless "watchdog" over politics - by means of guaranteeing the objectivity and independence of journalists - would not serve the purposes of those seeking the "manipulation of the media" along with their own interests.

In this context, it was concluded that journalists attached secondary importance to issues such as working overtime or being underpaid, and that their main concern was that of suffering "unemployment". Henceforth, most of the interviewees complained about the agreement among some media bosses who dominated the market that "prohibited the employment of a journalist in a media institution of one group who was fired from that of the other group." J7 asserted that a journalist who got fired subsequently "got prohibited from the profession" as well; and that therefore a journalist would tend to avoid being exposed to risks and would become "alienated" by what he/she does after a while.

The interviewees pointed to the unjustified dismissals of numerous journalists, using the economic crisis periods as an excuse. Accordingly, media bosses coerced some journalists to resign in different ways, so as not to pay their dismissal compensations. Media bosses depriving their employees of the benefits of Law 212²⁵,

²⁵ "The new media moguls such as Aydin Dogan forced all their employees to sign a clause (No. 1475, Labor Act) of the law governing relations between employers and employees, instead of clause 212 (Act on Labor-Management Relations in the Press) of the same law that grants special benefits to journalists, such as early retirement and high minimum wages. Clause 1475 basically reduced all journalists to the level

employing interns without salary or assurance, and understating their payrolls so as not to give higher insurance costs were among the many frequently complained about problems.

Regarding job security, while some journalists maintained that the organizational failure of journalists resulted from their own “passivism”, others asserted that this was caused by the general lack of civil society tradition in Turkey. These journalists claimed that they failed to organize in the profession, and that the existing organizations were closed to transformation. J7, Executive Committee member of The Association of Parliament Journalists (APJ)²⁶, related the reason why many organizations failed to work as effectively as APJ, once again with the deficiency of the new order of ownership:

None of the existing associations are effective. They are in the pursuit of small satisfactions. When you are weak as such, you fail to operate the decision mechanism. For instance, we want to condemn a friend who works in the same institution for looking after the boss’s economic interests. We fail to reach a decision since this might also compromise our own positions.

J4, claiming that being a union member is labeled as if it was a “crime” in Turkey, asserted that the problems are somewhat related to “the fading of humanely relations” in the new media order. J4,

of ordinary laborers and invalidated the privilege of being a journalist. In other words, Aydin Dogan as the owner of two major newspapers, Hürriyet and Milliyet, pressured his employees to resign from the union, pointing out that the terms and definitions of Law 212 used by the union to recruit journalists were ‘too generous’.” (Tunç, 2004)

²⁶ APJ was established in Ankara on April 29, 1964. The objective in its foundation is “to make parliament journalism a specialized branch in journalism.” It is the only organization to deal closely with emerging difficulties, to improve working conditions, to strengthen professional solidarity and to inspect its members’ activities in TBMM. APJ has the right to warn, condemn and prohibit its members’ right to enter the TBMM campus temporarily or permanently in the case that they resist to comply with the rules and procedures. For further information about the activities of APJ, see the official web site of the association, www.pmd.org.tr.

alleging that “the international capital indirectly supported” this condition in Turkey, exposed the different aspects of the occupational security problems as follows:

The humanely relations among journalists have totally faded away. The press is locked up in “media towers”. Magnetic ID cards were handed out to the employees. You know how you find out about your dismissal today? You arrive one morning trying to sign your card in. You are denied access because you were fired. You are facing a machine, not a human. More than 2-3 thousand journalists were dismissed recently, and more than half of them found out about their dismissals in this way. Media bosses have ruled out the unions from the media sector. Being a union member is a justified reason for dismissal, it is a crime. It is striking that the EU, pressuring Turkey so hard for democratization, totally ignores the issue of unionization. Here, we are faced with the indirect support of the international capital. Do you know any Copenhagen Criteria calling for the ceasing of de-unionization?

J4 explained that he could not find any employment for a long time after being dismissed from Milliyet Newspaper, owned by media mogul Aydın Doğan who held significant share of the media market. He said that he finally managed to find a job in an independent institution, which was later purchased by Doğan. J4’s ironic words “Doğan failed to purchase me, yet he purchased my newspaper” reveal the profound negative effects of media monopolization on the working class of the press.

As was also revealed before, Turkish journalists have no common understanding of “how journalism should be”. The statements of the interviewees indicate that the instrumentalization of media and

media personnel prevails in Turkey and such an instrumentalization is evidenced by a high degree of politicians' attempts to mislead the journalists so as to attain their individual objectives. According to the journalists, news sources' attempts to "attach journalists to themselves indebted" may be another manifestation of political instrumentalization of media. In this sense, it can be said that journalism in Turkey, lacking "autonomy" and "common professional norms", is not in the "service of public" but private interests. Though some interviewees insisted that the relationship between journalists and politicians was based on mutual interests and not indeed a "friendly" one, some others disclosed that intimate relationships exist, which causes journalists to overlook newsworthy issues or ignore them on purpose so as to "advocate" for their sources. However, it seems that apart from such exceptions, journalists can not decide which news will be published and which news will not. Journalists who are obliged to comply with the wishes of their employers were "forced" to protect not only the commercial interests of their employers, but also some political actors with whom their bosses have close relationships. It is obvious that in Turkey, the work of journalists is dominated by an inevitable fear of "being discharged", where the de-unionization process left employees unprotected.

4.6 Degeneration in the Profession

The interviewees maintained that the legal framework's insufficiency in regulating the operation of the media and the arbitrariness in practice caused some sort of "degeneration" in the profession. What the journalists have accounted on this subject might be assessed under two headings.

4.6.1 Professional Competence and Quality of “Newcomers”

The parliament journalists, while elucidating their views on almost every subject, commonly acknowledged that there was an apparent “degeneration” in the profession. They pointed out that there emerged a “shortfall of quality” among those who carried out journalism, especially after the 80’s, and that in this context, the employment criteria portrayed a great difference compared to the past.

Those more experienced, and capable of comparing the past and the present, complained about employers tending to hire young people with no distinct political views. 50 year-old J4 asserted that a good parliament journalist had to have knowledge on every issue, that one who lacked the qualifications of a judiciary journalist would be unable to analyze the works of the justice commission, or a financial journalist over the planning and budget commission, and that they would otherwise fail to report coverage according to journalistic principles. J4 subsequently complained about the fading of “master - apprentice” relationship that he deemed essential for professional progress and the new media environment that emerged where a journalist who made a mistake no longer felt ashamed of it.

J1 explained that the underlying reason why experienced journalists with a certain “stance” were no longer preferred by employers was the difficulty they suffered in getting them to do what they wanted, and claimed furthermore that “a principled journalist was one who was difficultly managed”.

Almost all of the experienced interviewees asserted that this transformation emerged with the flourishing of private TV channels. While J7 maintained that live broadcasting led young reporters to “indolence”, J8 asserted that “showman types” prevailed over experienced journalists.

J10 who explained that he could not find employment following his retirement, after working long years in important institutions, claimed that the employment criteria suffered a transformation after the Özal era. J10 identified the new generation of journalists who were favored in the media market and lacked the competence and courage to defend the main principles of the profession when faced with suppression as “the children of Özal”.

J3, claiming that his philosophy education urged for a sociological analysis of the subject, asserted that competence and experience in the profession was no longer deemed significant and that the de-politicization of the youth facilitated younger journalists’ adaptation to the requirements of the system regarding the democratization issues of Turkey:

Youngsters got disinclined from politics during the de-politicized process following the September 12 (1980 coup) period. Since they did not have a particular political opinion, they recognized the political understanding that was applied in practical life. That is how they met with politics. This is also the underlying reason in a sense why most of them got engaged right away with the political parties they covered.

Another problem J3 pointed out in this context was how experienced journalists who could not be discharged were “rendered inefficient” following the Özal era:

Until the Özal period, it was the journalists who generally carried out news relations. Previously, journalists used to contact the prime minister or the ministers. Correspondents used to perform executive duties and abstained from reporting news. Then, Özal began to call the correspondents for dinner, establishing relations in person and thus by-passing lower echelons. Correspondents and columnists stepped in, journalists were “neutralized”. This brought about another dimension to relations among newspaper executives and politicians. That is, the closer the executive was to the prime minister, the more favorable he/she became in the eyes of his boss. Otherwise, they got replaced.

While J12 maintained that the Press Council had some rules concerning “media ethics” on paper, they are far from binding, J1 pointed out that “media ethics” was a relative concept that could be gathered from “master – apprentice” relations, but experienced journalists who could teach young generations no longer existed. Young J2 claimed that journalists were also to be blamed for this, giving the following example of how they took part in their banning from parliament lobbies²⁷:

²⁷ The Bureau of Assembly decided to close parliamentary lobbies to parliament journalists in the 21st legislative period. Along with Association of Parliament Journalist (APJ) many journalist organizations and other professional organizations reacted to this decision, made unanimously on May 2, 2001. These organizations stated that such a ban would harm democratic tenets in a period when Turkey seeks to be a member of the European Union. In the period, parliament journalists protested this ban, refusing to watch all legislative activities. Finally, overlapping reactions and former Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit’s requests inflicted the authorities

Sometimes circumstances surpassing journalism can be experienced. We should have abstained from faulty behaviors that led to the idea of our banning from parliamentary lobbies. We had friends who got together with a group of MPs conversing or joking unprofessionally about inapt sexual matters. On the other hand, reporting a conversation that you overheard in the lobby is not ethical for whatever its worth.

4.6.2 The Pursuit of Organizational and Personal Interests

It has been emphasized in almost all declarations of journalistic principles that a journalist must not use her/his professional status to receive material or any other advantage for himself, for his relatives and intimates or third persons or organizations. In other words, it is declared that the journalist should not abuse freedom of expression and the opportunities provided by the profession for his/ her own profit, for maintaining personal relationships and satisfying personal ambitions, for profiting in any way of him/ herself or other people and organizations and should not use his/ her name and the profession for advertising and commercial purposes. It is generally stressed in these documents that the acceptance or granting of any kind of privilege which could impinge on publishing or editorial discretion is not compatible with the concept of a respectable, independent and responsible press. Anyone accepting bribes for the dissemination or suppression of news is guilty of dishonorable and unprofessional conduct.

to lift the ban on May 8, 2001. A second attempt to ban the entry of parliament journalists to the lobbies was made in the 22nd legislative period, which was lifted on the same day it was announced. The statement made by Parliamentary Speaker Bülent Arınç, (“Here is not Armada shopping center, from now on, everyone will not be able to poke their noses into everything”) was changed by his adviser in the late hours of the day.

In this context, the interviewees believed that there were two aspects of journalists who were close to political and financial circles and pursued interests by using their positions. The first one is the exploitation of journalists according to the political and economic interests of their institutions, where the second is a journalist using his/her position to pursue individual interests (including financial ones).

J12 asserted that parliament journalists had the opportunity of close contact with the people who governed the country; hence they were the ones who mainly pursued interest-based relations. J4 recounted the following about how journalists used their own positions to pursue economic interest and in order to survive in the system, further adding that employers favored the employees who facilitated their matters:

Follow up work, that defines the activity of journalists pursuing their employer's private interests, is always existent. First of all, the editor in chief does it. The man on the top employs you. Who will be favored? Naturally, the one who would facilitate the works of the owner will be favored. That is, an employer calls for journalists who would assist in the solution of his/her matters. If he/she has tourism investments, then he/she will go for the journalist who has close relations with the Minister of Tourism. Now how can you know where follow up begins and ends? These people, on the other hand, rapidly climb the echelons. They become executives, Ankara correspondents. Newspaper administrations can not make up all their cadres from journalists who carry out follow up. If they employ five people, they use only two for this duty. The

remaining three carry out business and protect the prestige of the media institution. Large amounts are offered to young people. This is not very easy to resist.

J7 reaffirmed the claim that journalists gained individual profits with the following example, portraying how they were exploited by the employer:

I know of an example where a journalist stepped in to restructure the debts of an institution owing to the Treasury. For instance, when you arrange your boss a call from the minister, your position is strengthened, you may even receive a bonus. When everyone gets 7, 5 percent raise, you get 17, 5.

J12 maintained that pursuing interests existed in every unit of a media institution, and further alleged that some journalists even committed “prostitution” in exchange for news:

Follow up exists. The more the financial aspect of the matter increases, the higher the position of its performer. If it is a small matter such as advertising, the journalist would deal with it. But if there is a high bid, for instance, then the boss would deal with it. There are such journalists that would do these on their own accord, just to please their bosses. Their own interest, on the other hand, might be to keep their jobs, or their careers. They may also profit from this relationship. That is, keeping the job on the one hand, and taking a commission on the other. I know of a journalist who committed prostitution for instance, in exchange of money, of news...

J9 recounted some examples of how journalists profited financially without their bosses knowing:

Some, for instance, resolve the business of Firm A by using their individual contact with the minister responsible for customs. Some of these are individual deeds, the boss has no knowledge. Then, the journalist purchases a brand new jeep after concluding the follow up, that would hardly have purchased with the particular salary they got from a newspaper. We have friends who even have their own private offices.

J6, the most experienced among the interviewees, pointed out that, journalists who reported “news in exchange for money” existed since the very beginning. Another experienced journalist, J10 alleged that the most basic example of pursuing interest was “the journalists using their positions in facilitating some citizens’ matters in public institutions through their close relations with politicians; and gave some of the money they received from the citizen to the politician.”

J3, claiming that the main objective of a source was to make the journalist dependent on him/herself, exposed how serious the problem got through the following personal experience:

A mayor once implied that he would purchase me an automobile. At the time, I had not performed my military duty. He/she mentioned that I could do it in the football club of their municipality. He/she claims not wanting anything in exchange, but tries to make you dependent. Every journalist has experienced this.

Some of the interviewees, especially the younger ones, maintained that using their positions “for the sake of humanity” would not necessarily be deemed as “the pursuit of interest”. J13 portrayed his approach to “the pursuit of interest” as follows:

Almost all parliamentary journalists have received demands as almost all MPs have. If someone had a health problem or similar and really needed help, I would try to be of assistance. There is no profit for me in it. If someone desperately needs employment and I can arrange a call with someone, this would not be a pursuit of interest. It might be disapproved, yet in Turkey’s conditions this would be deemed as assistance.

Nevertheless, some interviewees such as J1, who asserted that there was no degree of pursuit of interest, objected to these opinions, and further expressed that “everyone has a price; acquiring medicine from the pharmacy of the parliament, using public camps in holidays through the help of MPs, or following bids are no different from each other in this sense”.

The statements of interviewees, including harsh criticisms and self-criticisms about how media and journalists function in Turkey, in this and previous sections reveal that journalism in Turkey is characterized by a weak professionalization.

Furthermore, journalists speak of an inevitable degeneration in their profession, roughly tied to the aforementioned deficiencies of the current media system in Turkey. Thus, the lack of a common will to protect the profession from suppressions of power circles produced a

crisis that could not be prevented by external inspection mechanisms. According to the interviewees, journalists' failure to collaborate in fighting this crisis is another cause of this exceeding problem by the journalists themselves. Therefore, whatever its reason, it can be said that journalistic professionalization is weak in Turkey, reflecting the negative consequences of both the new ownership structure and the exclusion of public interests from political and social processes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this study, the practices of journalism in Turkey have been analyzed depending on 14 parliament journalists' assessments, with the main aim of revealing whether these practices sufficiently contribute to democracy. Thus, to achieve this general purpose, how journalism is being made under which circumstances and whether current journalistic practices in Turkey are compatible with the universally agreed professional principles are evaluated. In other words, how the general situation of the country and the media system in particular reflect on the daily practices of journalists have been disclosed by giving voice to media professionals whose main task is to report political affairs.

In liberal democratic countries, as media is given the role of paving the way for freedom of expression and the dissemination of a plurality of viewpoints, journalists' commitment to an objective, impartial, balanced way of reporting and their respect for ethical norms are considered a vital prerequisite for democracy. However, it is presumed that there could be some obstacles to the implementation of basic principles of journalism as such, depending on the peculiar characteristics of the countries within which individual media systems develop.

Thus, this work reviewed first the views on the alleged connections between media and political systems and the evolution of journalistic practices in general, with a special emphasis on the universally agreed principles of journalism. Then, development of the media and journalism in Turkey, including the general frame of nationally agreed principles of journalism was touched on before the detailed analysis of journalist interviewees' statements.

Depending on the assertions of journalists, it may be concluded in the general sense that the development of the media and journalism in Turkey is directly related to the ongoing social, political and economic situation of the country and can not be isolated from its history within which the tradition of journalism has been rooted.

Turkey, with its democracy interrupted by military interventions and 50 years experience of multi-party system, endeavored to integrate itself into the global economic system, especially towards the end of the 80's. Today, where a democratic parliamentarian system prevails, Turkey strives to fortify the claim that its media system is characterized by the notion of "freedom of press", through the recent reforms carried out within the framework of EU accession process. Nevertheless, Turkey has been exposed to serious criticism in this sphere, especially for its deficiency and failure in the implementation and execution of these reforms.

Journalists' statements support the claims that in Turkey the media market structure is characterized by a high degree of concentration. The negative consequences of late but rapid flourishing of commercial media in the 1990s in an uncontrolled manner, without the preparation of the required legal framework left the subsequent problems of regulation still unresolved. It seems that the lack of a comprehensive legal framework to eliminate concentration of media

ownership brought about a number of problems, which may be conceived as the main obstacle for the development of a free media. Thus, businessmen who had interests in other sectors such as construction, banking, telecommunications, etc. tend to dominate the media market, so as to gain political influence and thereby maximize their economic interests. Furthermore, journalists affirmed that especially after the flourishing of private TV channels, sensational news had taken the place of informational content. According to them, the written press is characterized by a low circulation in Turkey, as tabloid content is embedded in “would-be” quality papers and the news media has lost its reliability in the eyes of the people. Thus, as claimed by the interviewed journalists, it can be argued that Turkish media is both commercial and rooted in the world of politics, transforming into an inter-elite communication device and leaving aside its idealized function to inform citizens in an objective and impartial manner. Furthermore, it seems that political groups are also in the pursuit of using media on behalf of their own interests.

Journalists’ assessments that are laden with harsh criticisms also indicate that journalistic professionalism is not so strongly developed in Turkey, where media workers, deprived of job security, are “instrumentalized” by their employers and outside political actors for private interests. In this context, it can be suggested that the absence of effective journalistic organizations like unions or associations reflects the general lack of consensus of ethical standards and leaves the journalists unprotected from the coercion of their employers.

However as derived from the interviews, journalists seem to be or tend to be involved in politics, despite institutional constraints to make them comply with the instructions of their employers. In other words, journalists tend towards a commentary or advocacy form of

news making, in line with the general policy of the media institution they work for.

Interviewed journalists also associate journalistic practices in Turkey with a high degree of “degeneration”, evidenced in the decline of professional competence and quality of young journalists and journalists pursuing institutional and individual private interests rather than the public’s. Related to the negative consequences of the aforementioned deficiencies of media structure, in order to survive under competitive pressures, journalists are either forced to comply with the demands of their bosses or they prefer to do so.

On the other hand, Turkey’s rapid move towards a high technological and commercial progress, along with increasingly market-oriented forms of journalism or commercialization can not be ignored. However, at least “for the time being”, it seems that the forces of change are far from leading Turkey to develop a media system and a journalistic practice that are free from political influence. It seems impossible to claim a differentiation of the media system from the political system in a country where media and its practitioners are highly involved in the world of politics and a high degree of state intervention in media prevails. It seems that Turkey’s efforts to be a member of EU through a number of reforms is not yet sufficient to improve the current situation of media and journalism, for the alleged deficiencies are a matter of Turkey’s multidimensional peculiar historical, social, political, economic and cultural characteristics, which can not be eliminated by a few reforms that are not implemented properly. In Turkey market-oriented forms of journalism also could not eliminate the pattern of political instrumentalization of news media and competitive pressures hindering the development of a neutral journalistic professionalism.

Turkish journalists, who can not enjoy basic rights such as independence or unionization and try to survive under several competitive and managerial pressures, are not able to fulfill basic principles of journalism in the proper sense. Their statements show that some journalists are involved in activities threatening their independence of judgment, which limit their objectivity and undermine their journalistic dignity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TURKISH PRESS COUNCIL'S CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS FOR THE PRESS

Considering the Freedom of Communication in our country as the basic precondition of achieving human dignity, open government and democracy;

Pledging with our own free will that we shall struggle whenever and wherever necessary against all restrictions concerning Freedom of Communication generating from the law makers or other organisations and individuals;

Accepting the Freedom of Communication as an instrument of the people's right to know the truth;

Assessing that the main function of journalism is to discover the facts and communicate them to the public without distortion or exaggerating;

Reiterating our rejection of any external interference over the activities of the Press Council;

We, journalists declare to the public, to observe the following Code of Professional Principles of the Press as a corollary of our above mentioned fundamental beliefs:

No person shall be denounced or ridiculed in publications on the account of his/her race, sex, age, health, disabled condition, social status or religious beliefs.

Nothing that restricts freedom of thought, conscience and expression or is damaging or offensive to public moral, religious sentiments or the foundations of the institution of family shall be published.

Journalism being a public function shall not be used as a vehicle of immoral private pursuits and interests.

Nothing that humiliates, ridicules or defames private or public persons beyond the limits of fair criticism shall be published. Private lives of individuals shall not be reported except when made necessary by the public interest.

Every effort shall be made to ensure that news stories that can be verified through normal journalistic channels shall not be published before investigation or shall not be put in print (broadcast) before a thorough assessment of its validity.

Information given on condition of confidentiality shall not be published (broadcast), except when made urgently necessary by public interest.

A media product produced by a medium of communication shall not be presented to the public by another medium or communication as its own, until it has completed its distribution process. Attention shall be paid to cite the source of media products received from news agencies.

No person shall be declared "guilty" until he/she has been tried and convicted by judicial authorities.

Those actions deemed criminal by laws shall not be attributed to individuals without reasonable and persuasive evidence to that effect.

Journalists shall protect the confidentiality of their sources, except in the circumstances where the source is deliberately trying to mislead the public for personal, political, economic etc. reasons.

Journalists shall refrain from doing their duty with methods and manners that may be detrimental to the good name of the profession.

Publication of material that is conducive to violence, offensive to human values and use of force shall be avoided.

Paid announcements and advertisements shall be presented in such a way that leaves no room for doubt their true nature.

Embargoes on publication dates shall be respected.

The press (media) shall respect the right of reply and correction arising from inaccurate information.

Source: Official web site of the Turkish Press Council
(<http://www.basinkonseyi.org.tr/english/bmiing.htm>)

APPENDIX B

TURKISH JOURNALISTS' DECLARATION OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Preface:

Every journalist and media organization should defend the rights of journalists, observe professional principles and ensure that the principles defined below are followed.

Those who are not journalists but participate at journalistic activities in media organizations under different forms, and those who target audiences in Turkey from abroad or audiences abroad from Turkey also come under the responsibilities defined here.

The executive directors of media organizations, chief editors, managing editors, responsible editors and others are responsible for the compliance with professional principles by the journalists they employ and the media product they produce with professional principles.

Journalists' rights constitute the basis of the public's right to be informed and its freedom of expression. Professional principles, on the other hand, are the foundations of an accurate and reliable

communication of information.

Professional principles presuppose the self-control of journalists and media organizations.

Their primary basis for judgment is their own conscience.

A. Human and Citizen Rights:

Every individual has the right to be informed, have access to news, freedom of thought, expression, and the right to criticize freely.

Freedom of press and publication, which is the main tool of freedom of thought and expression, is one of the basic human rights.

It is a general rule that these rights should be guaranteed by the constitution in a democratic state.

B. Definition of A Journalist:

Any individual whose job is to gather, process, communicate news or express opinion, ideas and views regularly at a daily or periodical printed, video, audio, electronic or digital medium employed on a fulltime, contractual or copyright basis and whose main employment and means of livelihood consist of this job, and who is defined as such by the legislation that covers the functioning of the organization at which he or she is employed is a journalist.

All enterprises functioning in the field of press and publication are obliged to recognize the rights granted to journalists by law.

C. Responsibilities of Journalists:

The journalist uses press freedom conscientiously and honestly to further the public's right to be informed and have access to accurate news. For this purpose, the journalist should fight all kinds of censorship and self-censorship and inform the public concerning this question.

The responsibility of the journalist to the public supersedes all other responsibilities, including to employer and public authorities.

Information, news and free thought are of a social nature that separates them from all other commercial commodities and services. The journalist carries all responsibility for the news and information he or she makes public.

The limits and contents of journalists' freedom are primarily determined by their responsibility and professional principles.

D. Journalists' Rights:

1. Journalists have the right of free access to all sources of information and the right to observe and research all phenomena that affect public life or are of interest to the public.

Obstacles, such as secrecy or classification, brought against journalists should be based on law in matters concerning public affairs and convincing reasons in private matters.

2. Journalists must take into account the basic policy line of the media organization that should be included among the terms of their employment contract.

3. Journalists have the right to reject all sorts of suggestions, proposals, requests and instructions that remain outside or conflict

with or are not openly described in that basic policy.

4. Journalists cannot be compelled to defend an opinion that they do not share or perform any assignment that violates professional principles.

5. Journalists, particularly those who are employed at an editorial and managerial level, should be informed about important decisions that affect and determine the functioning of the media organization; whenever it is necessary they should take part in making these decisions.

6. Relevant to their function and responsibilities, journalists have the right to organize. They also have the right to sign contracts individually to safeguard their moral and material interests. The journalists should be paid a salary commensurate with their social role, their skill and the amount of work required. Their salaries should also guarantee their economic independence.

7. According to the principle of protection of sources, the journalists cannot be compelled to reveal his or her sources or testify about them. This principle may be waived with of the sources consent. The journalist may reveal the identity of his or her source in cases where he or she has been clearly misled by the source.

E. The Basic Duties and Principles of the Journalist:

1. Public has a right to know. The journalists has to respect facts and report accurately, whatever the consequences from his personal point of view.

2. The journalist defends, at whatever cost, the freedom of gathering

information, news evaluation and making comments and criticism.

3. The journalist defends the universal values of humanity, chiefly peace, democracy and human rights, pluralism and display respect for differences. Without any discrimination against nations, races, ethnicities, classes, sexes, languages, religious and philosophical beliefs, the journalist recognizes the rights and respectability of all nations, peoples and individuals. The journalist refrains from publishing material that incites enmity and hatred among individuals, nations and human societies. The journalist should not make the target of direct attack the cultural values or beliefs (or lack of beliefs) of any human society or of an individual. The journalist should publish or broadcast material that justifies or incites violence of any kind.

4. The journalist should refrain from publishing and broadcasting news and information, the source of which is unknown to him or her. In cases where the source is not known, he/she is obliged to warn the public.

5. The journalist cannot ignore or destroy relevant information, alter or falsify texts and documents. He or she must refrain from publishing material that is incorrect, falsified or misleading.

6. The journalist cannot resort to misleading methods in order to obtain information, news, visual images, audio material or other documents.

7. Even if the person in question is a public figure, unless journalists obtain permission, they cannot violate privacy for purposes that are not directly related to the public's right to information.

8. Journalists are committed to the rule that any inaccurate information published should be corrected in the shortest possible time. Every journalist respects the right to respond on condition that it is not misused or abused.

9. According to the rule of professional secrecy, journalists under no circumstances can reveal the sources of information and documents entrusted to them unless allowed by their sources.

10. Journalists should refrain from purloin, slander, insult, distortion, manipulation, rumour, gossip and groundless accusation.

11. Journalists cannot seek material gains or moral advantages from the publication or by withholding piece of information or news. Professional principles are the main guide of the journalists in forming and conducting their relations with people or institutions, sources of information, all from the head of state to the members of parliament or from businessmen to bureaucrats.

12. Journalists should not mix their profession with advertising public relations activities or propaganda. Journalists cannot accept suggestions advice or material benefits from sources of advertisement.

13. Whatever the subject matter is, journalists can not use information for personal interest before it is fully made public. They can not use their profession to obtain any form for personal privilege (outside the rights given by laws and regulations).

14. Journalists cannot resort to blackmail or any form of threat to obtain information. Journalists should resist all pressure to gather information by such means.

15. Journalists must reject all kinds of pressure and should not accept instructions regarding their job from anyone except the executives of the media organizations employing them.

16. Anyone entitled to be called a journalist is committed to abide by professional principles fully. While observing due respect to the laws of the country, journalists should rebuff all interference from the government and similar official institutions. Professionally, journalists take into account only the judgment of the public or other colleagues and verdicts of independent jurisdiction.

17. Journalists function according to public's right to know, not to prejudices regarding domestic and international policy issues shaped by the people in the administration of country. Journalists are guided solely by basic professional principles and concerns for a free democracy.

TURKISH JOURNALISTS CODE OF CONDUCT

News Commentary:

The distinction between news and commentary or editorials should be made clear to enable the public to discern easily the difference between them.

Photography – Visual Images:

Any photography or visual image used should be clearly marked to show whether it is actual or enactment or simulation. The audience should be allowed to discern easily whether the image is actual or a representation.

News – Advertisement - Announcement:

The texts and visual elements of news and editorials should be clearly separated from the texts and visual elements of advertisements and commercial announcement to leave no room for confusion.

Judicial Reporting:

During the preparatory investigation of a legal case, news and commentaries that might influence and weaken the legal process should not be disseminated. News during the trial should be supplied free of any prejudice or inaccuracy. The journalist should not become a party in any legal process about which he or she is reporting. Nobody should be represented as guilty before the legal verdict is finalized. Nobody should be implied as guilty in news and commentaries unless found guilty at the end of the legal process.

Minors:

Full identities and visual images of minors as defendants, witnesses or victims in criminal or sexual assault cases should not be printed or made public. In cases where the personality and behavior of minors could be affected, journalists should not interview or take the visual image of a minor unless given prior permission by the family or an adult responsible for the minor in question.

Sexual Assault:

The visual images and identities of the victims of sexual assault cases should not be printed or made public expect for instances where there is a clear public interest in such publication.

Identity and Special Cases:

An action or an offence committed by an individual should not be attributed to his or her race, nationality, religion, sex or sexual choice, any disease or physical or mental disorder unless there is relevance or evident public interest. These special character traits should never be the subject of ridicule insult or prejudice.

Health:

Sensationalism in health issues should be avoided, Dissemination of information that would incite desperation or create false hope should be prevented. Rudimentary findings of medical research should not be presented as final and definitive. Before suggesting the use of a particular drug, an expert scientist should be consulted. Any journalist, who is conducting research work at hospitals, should openly declare his or her identity and enter prohibited areas only with the permission of hospital authorities. Journalists should not take visual images or audio recordings at hospitals without the permission of hospital authorities, the patient or relatives in charge.

Gifts:

Journalists should reject personal gifts and material benefits that would create doubt or prejudice in the public over the contents of a particular news item or information and the decision to make it public.

Company Interests:

The rights, responsibilities and duties of journalists described in “The Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities” determine how they function within a media organization. Within this professional framework, the journalist should not take part in activities not relevant to the policies of the media organization, either voluntarily or by compulsion, even though such activity maybe in the company's interest.

Self-criticism:

Journalists and media organizations should correct their mistakes and engage in self-criticism beyond their legal obligation to respect the right of reply and denial.

Being a Part:

Journalist and media organizations should clearly announce their positions in cases where they are parties in a dispute or a contract. Any media organization or commentator can disseminate comments along the lines of their political, economic and social affiliations. In such cases, the nature of the affiliation should be clearly stated and clear distinction between commentary and news should be made.

Privacy:

The basic principle is the protection of public interest. Situations under which the privacy principle does not apply include:

- a. Research and publication on major corruption or crime cases;
- b. Research and publication on conducts that would have negative effects on the public;

- c. Cases where public security or health is at stake;
- d. Need to prevent the public being misled or deceived or from committing mistakes because of the actions or statements of the person in question.

Even in these situations, the private information made public should be directly related to the subject. It should be considered to what extent the private life of the person in question affects his or her public activity.

Information – Documents:

Journalists should not take documents, photography, audio recording or visual images without the consent of the person in possession of these expect in cases where public interest is at stake. This principle can only be waived in cases where there is clear public interest, and if the journalist has firm conviction that the material cannot be obtained otherwise.

Payment in Exchange for Information:

The journalist should not offer or give money in exchange for information, documents or visual images, to defendants of a criminal case or to witnesses or to their associates.

In Cases of Shock and Confusion:

When there are people in distress, sorrow, danger, disaster, destruction and shock, the journalist's approach in research should be humane and respectful of privacy. He or she must refrain from exploiting feelings.

Relatives and Associates of Defendants:

Journalists should not expose the relatives and associates of defendants or convicted persons unless they are directly related to or essential for a correct perception of the events that transpired.

Suicide Cases:

In cases of suicide, publishing or broadcasting information in an exaggerated way that goes beyond normal dimensions of reporting with the purpose of influencing readers or spectators should not occur. Photography, pictures, visual images or film depicting such cases should not be made public.

Economic and Financial Information (Inside Information):

Even if the current law does not ban it, journalists should not use economic and financial information obtained for personal interests before making it fully public. Journalist should not disseminate information about securities, stocks, shares and other valuable papers they or their relatives or associates hold, without accurately informing their superiors at the media organization about such ownership. Journalists should not indulge in the dealership either directly or indirectly of real estate and other valuables that they choose as the subject matter of their news and commentaries.

Embargo, Preview, Off-the-Record:

Journalists should comply with the publication date set by the source of a piece of information or a document unless they have obtained such information independently. Journalists have no commitment to let anyone, including the source, preview the drafts of news stories,

interviews, commentaries or visual images of material they are preparing to publish or broadcast, except responsible persons at the media organizations employing them. Journalists should not publish or broadcast off-the-record information or statements.

Competition:

Journalists should refrain from deliberately causing professional harm to their colleagues even for reasons of competition. They should refrain from acts that would prevent their colleagues' material from reaching the public.

Sourcing:

Journalist should have credit to the sources of information, including material from agencies, other colleagues or other publications.

Non - journalists:

The actual titles and professions of those who perform journalistic activities at media organizations periodically or occasionally should be clearly announced so as to inform the public.

Questions of Identity:

Whatever the expertise of a journalist, his or her main job is journalism. Police reporters should not act or disseminate information as policemen or police spokespersons. Likewise sports reporters are not spokespersons for sports clubs not are reporters assigned to a political party members or spokespersons for that party.

Source: Official website of the Turkish Journalists' Community
(<http://www.tgc.org.tr/englishbildirge.html>)