

NOVEMBER 2023
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JOURNALIST

POST

08

DIMITRY MURATOV:
DON'T LET THEM SHUT
DOWN SOCIAL MEDIA!

44

ÓSCAR MARTINEZ: DARK TIMES
NECESSITATE A GREATER
NEED FOR JOURNALISM

46

WALID BATRAWI:
PALESTINIAN JOURNAL-
ISTS IN THE FIRING LINE

**Turkey's Dreyfus
Mehmet Baransu
in jail for
3168 days**

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- **Not an illusion, a real danger. Do not go to Turkey!**
Prof. Dr. Frank Überall **6**
- **We will never back down**
Ekaterina Glikman **12**
- **Watch out! Fake News!**
Iryna Synelnyk **14**
- **Only facts can counter fake news**
Oksana Chykanchy **16**
- **Balkan meida resist**
Xhemajl Rexha **18**
- **Freedom of the press is not the only problem in Colombia, there are no ethical values either!**
Salomé Saldarriaga J. **22**
- **Turkey's Dreyfus Journalist Mehmet Baransu is in jail for 3168 days**
Gülizar Baki, İsmail Sağıroğlu, Şemsi Açıkgöz **24**
- **How free is the Arab world?**
Yavuz Acar **34**
- **Press freedom in South Africa: Reasons for complacency**
Dr. Mia Swart **36**
- **Strong Women Journalists for a Strong Africa**
Catherine Gicheru **38**
- **"African journalists in exile are isolated."**
Fathi Osman **40**
- **Press freedom in Germany: Whining from up here**
Thora Meißner **42**
- **Dark times necessitate a greater need for journalism**
Óscar Martínez **44**
- **Palestinian journalists in the firing line**
Walid Batrawi **46**
- **We are not safe anywhere in the world**
Yüksel Durgut **48**
- **40-day strike against the radical right**
Lou Phily **50**
- **Exiled journalists must act together**
Dr. Kezban Karagöz **53**
- **Cartoon** Carlos Latuff **58**



NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER RUSSIAN JOURNALIST **DIMITRY MURATOV:**

DON'T LET THEM SHUT DOWN SOCIAL MEDIA!

Let's not let YouTube and Wikipedia be shut down. These are the last channels where journalists can share information. If the Russian authorities close down social media, they'll get the propaganda they want. **8**

Zahra Joya



"THIS PHOTO PUT ME IN PRISON FOR 2 YEARS"
20



WE ARE NOT SAFE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD
48

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YÜKSEL DURGUT EDITOR

We die, they grow

Prof Baron Peter Piot, a Belgian-born British microbiologist known for his work on Ebola and AIDS, says journalists can save more lives than doctors. Unfortunately, for this wish to come true, journalists must first survive.

We are in contact with many countries around the world as we prepare the Journalist Post. Apart from the names of people and places in the articles sent to the magazine, all the stories have similar problems. To express our problems, we speak and write on every platform, we publish statements through international journalist associations to make our voices heard. The result is getting worse by the day. Unfortunately, while we are united, dictatorial regimes are growing.

The world is falling under the influence of authoritarian regimes every day. The current threat to democracy is the main reason for this decline. According to reports, about 38 per cent of the world's population is not free. Countries caught between democracy and authoritarianism are increasingly turning to autocracy.

For the first time in 20 years, there are more closed autocracies than liberal democracies.

The global order is approaching a breaking point. Unless strong democratic countries work together to guarantee freedom for humanity and exert pressure, the authoritarian model will prevail in the world order.

The latest example of this can be seen when you watch Turkish President R. Tayyip Erdoğan berating American PBS journalist Amna Nawaz during a broadcast. He told the reporter: "Don't interrupt me. You have no right to interrupt me. You should respect me." Unfortunately, like Erdoğan, journalists in

one-man countries from Russia to Eritrea, from Saudi Arabia to El Salvador, do not have the courage to ask questions.

Erdoğan and similar one-man dictators are used to talking to journalists who nod their heads at every word that comes out of their mouths. When a real journalist appears in front of them and asks a question, all they know how to do is snub him.

In this issue you will read how two historical figures are linked to Mehmet Baransu, the hero of the cover story. You will see how the Dreyfus case, which divided France at the dawn of the 20th century, is similar to the Baransu case today.

Emile Zola, who stood upright in the face of injustice and fought until the last moment of his life, published a letter entitled "I accuse - J'accuse" in which he said: "Truth and justice are absolute rulers." Zola's letter opened a new chapter in the Dreyfus case. Because this letter is a unique challenge to the government in the history of journalism.

The Baransu trial is a precedent that shows how those who ruthlessly and lawlessly demand heads in order to get the votes of the people can blacken human life. The Dreyfus case is the best example in the history of law in every respect. Like Zola, who has a respected place in world literature, Baransu is a brave journalist who stands behind all the news he reports and pays the price in 'captivity'. "We want justice. We are talking about the sword that may be our master tomorrow! Bigotedly kissing the hilt of that sword? Never!" Like Zola, the place where courage is represented in Turkey is the dungeon. In this dungeon there is a brave journalist who has been imprisoned for more than 8 years and whom the world should know better: Mehmet BARANSU. ■



PROF. DR. FRANK ÜBERALL *

Not an illusion, a real danger. Do not go to Turkey!

All this can only be seen as sheer arbitrariness. Can a comment or even a simple 'like' on social networks suddenly put an end to a holiday? The German Association of Journalists (DJV) therefore strongly advises against travelling to Turkey. No matter how beautiful the country and the people may be... no matter how much one longs for democracy and the rule of law there.

Turkey is still one of the most popular holiday destinations for Germans. According to a recent study by the Allensbach Institute, more people travelled to Turkey this year than to Croatia, Greece or France. Turkey is a beautiful country: It is rich in culture and scenery, its cuisine is uniquely delicious, its people are hospitable. And flights to Turkey can sometimes be found for under €50 return.

But for many people, Turkey is not a holiday destination. They cannot even go on business trips with a clear conscience. At best they face deportation, at worst imprisonment without the possi-

bility of a fair trial under the rule of law. The group of journalists is particularly affected. It is enough to have made a statement on the Internet criticising the Turkish government, or President Erdoğan in particular, and you can be handcuffed at the airport.

This is not an illusion, it is a real danger! On its website, the German Foreign Office clearly states that there are still 'cases' of arbitrary detention of German citizens in Turkey. They are often suspected of propagating or supporting a (so-called) terrorist organisation. "It appears that Turkish law enforcement agencies keep detailed lists of people

living in Germany who could become targets of the security forces, without even adequate preliminary investigations,” the official website of the German Foreign Office reads. Even ‘likes’ on social networks, which are a fundamental right of freedom of expression in Germany, can be sufficient grounds for an investigation in Turkey.

Then there is the new ‘law to combat disinformation’, which has been heavily criticised by the Foreign Office. According to this law, the dissemination of statements that are deemed by law enforcement authorities to be untrue and a threat to the country’s security, public order or public health can lead to criminal prosecution. Even participants in demonstrations in Germany or members of a legally registered association dealing with Kurdish issues in this country can be arrested.

All this can only be seen as sheer arbitrariness. Can a comment or even a simple ‘like’ on social networks suddenly put an end to a holiday? The German Association of Journalists (DJV) therefore strongly advises against travelling to Turkey. No matter how beautiful the country and the people are... No matter how much you long for democracy and the rule of law.

Journalism is treated as a crime in Turkey. Independent and even critical reporting is no longer possible. Freedom of the press seems to have become a foreign word for the Turkish government and state institutions.

Of course, there are still some spaces where it is possible to practice journalism without arbitrary persecution. But there are also countless cases of media workers being imprisoned simply for exercising their profession. For example, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier recently mentioned the journalist Ahmet Altan. At a cultural evening entitled ‘Exile’ at Bellevue Palace, Steinmeier used Altan as an example of all those imprisoned in Turkey or not allowed to leave the country.

Although the ceremony was dedicated to exiles around the world, Turkey played a recurring role in the President’s

speech, for example when he mentioned Aslı Erdoğan. Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that Aslı Erdoğan is one of Turkey’s most internationally recognised writers. She was arrested in 2016 for her work as a columnist for the Turkish-Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Gündem*. She has been living in exile in Germany since 2017.

He is not alone. The number of people forced to leave Turkey for fear of arbitrary persecution is increasing every day. The term ‘criminal’ is hardly appropriate in this context. The European Court of Human Rights has had to point out in a number of individual cases that basic standards are not being respected in Turkey. But that does not stop the government there from insisting on violating human rights.

Now, it could be argued that a travel warning specifically for journalists is excessive. Who cares about politics when you are lying on the beach in the perfect sunshine, admiring the culture and nature, enjoying the food and drink? Anyone who thinks that should ask themselves if they have ever publicly criticised Turkey or Erdoğan.

In this country, you are free to criticise the prime minister, the president, anyone and everything, as long as you do not cross the line into insulting someone or committing a specific crime. In Turkey you cannot do that so easily. You can be thrown in jail for making an offhand remark. Maybe even in a supposedly ‘personal’ environment: a conversation on the Internet, Facebook or X (formerly Twitter)...

In Germany, it is almost inconceivable that the police and judiciary would investigate such sources and draw up “enemy lists”. In Turkey, it seems to be part of everyday life. Otherwise, the Foreign Ministry would have long since removed these explicit statements from its website. ■

** Prof. Dr. Frank Überall is the Federal President of the German Association of Journalists (DJV). He teaches at the University of Media, Communication and Economics (HMKW) in Cologne and works as a journalist for digital broadcaster KIVVON.*



PHOTO: YÜKSEL DURGUT

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER RUSSIAN JOURNALIST **DIMITRY MURATOV**:

DON'T LET THEM SHUT DOWN SOCIAL MEDIA

Let's not let YouTube and Wikipedia be shut down. These are the last channels where journalists can share information. If the Russian authorities close down social media, they'll get the propaganda they want.



“Our newspaper Novaya Gazeta has also been closed down. We were deprived of our licence. The website was closed. It now operates in Riga under the name Novaya Gazeta Europe. The website was banned again in Russia shortly after its launch.

JOURNALIST POST

Dimitry Muratov is one of the last representatives of independent journalism in Russia, known for investigating the government's bad policies. Muratov, whose founder and editor-in-chief Novaya Gazeta (New Newspaper) was shut down, was awarded the world's most prestigious peace prize, the 2021 Nobel Prize, along with Filipino journalist Maria Ressa, for his “efforts to protect freedom of expression.”

Despite Russian leader Vladimir Putin's increasing pressure on the media, Novaya has not compromised its independence. Under Muratov's leadership, the paper has reported on human rights abuses, corruption, election fraud, police brutality and many other investigative journalism stories. It played a role in the publication of the Panama Papers.

The government has targeted the paper. In the 2000s, six Novaya Gazeta journalists lost their lives in attacks. Muratov, who was seen as the face of the paper, also received threats. He was attacked on a train with red paint mixed with acetone. But at every opportunity he spoke out in favour of a free press.

HE SOLD HIS NOBEL PRIZE FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

When the Kremlin called Russia's invasion of Ukraine a “military operation”, media outlets that used the word “war” began to lock their doors. Novaya Gazeta, unable to withstand the pressure, suspended its operations in March 2022. Shortly after the occupation, Novaya Gazeta also stopped publishing.

At every opportunity, Muratov says that the silencing of critical media in Russia is part of the Putin government's efforts to hide its failures from the public.

Last year, the intrepid journalist auctioned his 2021 Nobel Peace Prize medal to benefit Ukrainian refugee children. The medal sold for \$103.5 million, breaking the record for similar prizes previously put up for sale.

Nobel Peace Prize winner and exiled journalist Dimitry Muratov talks to journalists, including the editors of the *Journalist Post*, about what is happening in Russia.

As a Nobel laureate, I have officially asked the International Committee of the Red Cross to help Alexei Navalny, the leader of the Russian opposition. He is not only in prison, he is a prisoner in a prison within a prison. This is a place where people are turned into living corpses. But the Red Cross said they could not intervene. When I made this request, the head of the Red Cross was in a meeting in the office of the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov.

I get a lot of questions about the Russian legal system. This is one of the consequences of what is called a special military operation. This is the dismantling of the judiciary. Special military operations are taking place, but the consequences are already clear.

Ukraine and Russia will never be together in the future. They will never be brothers. There is a new geographical awakening in Russia. You may not have heard of it. Russia is no longer Europe. The window to Europe is closed and even bars have been put on the door.

The Russian Orthodox Church supported the special military operation and launched a propaganda of death. A priest was dismissed for replacing the word ‘victory’ with the word ‘peace’ during a church service. ►

“Give me a chance to be a mother”

►Noting that being a dissident in Russia is considered grounds for punishment, Muratov describes what has happened to some dissidents as follows: “Lilia Chanysheva, a 40-year-old woman. She worked for Alexei Navalny. She did not kill anyone, did not steal, did not use violence. She was just a civil activist. Have you ever seen how people go crazy waiting for their loved ones? This woman waits for her husband every day with flowers. Lilia didn’t say a word about herself, but she said: “If I’m sentenced, I won’t have time to have children, give me the chance to be a mother. The judge didn’t give her that chance. She was sentenced to 7.5 years imprisonment. Cruelty also manifests itself in patriotism. That’s why evil has become terrorism.

The Russian Orthodox Church supported the special military operation and launched a propaganda of death. A priest was deposed for replacing the word ‘victory’ with the word ‘peace’ during a church service.

Take Ivan Gorshkovich, for example. He is the Moscow correspondent for the Wall Street Journal, a journalist. He is very well known in Moscow. He really loves the country he works for. He’s a very successful journalist and certainly not a spy. He was put behind bars for espionage. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

The politician Vladimir Kara-Murza is a famous writer. You may remember the Magnitsky case, a symbol of the fight against corruption in Russia. Magnitsky was found to have 280 million dollars missing. This news was revealed by Kara-Murza. Kara-Murza, a journalist, writer, filmmaker, is now a political prisoner, sentenced to 25 years. In one year she has lost 25 kilos. She has not been allowed to make a single phone call to her three children.

There has been no official anti-Semitic propaganda in Russia for 20 years. No one can accuse Putin of being an anti-Semite. But neo-Nazis are in the political arena of today’s Russia. Today’s arrests and violations may seem fewer than in the past.

JUNTA OR FREEDOM?

Muratov, who says the older generation supports Putin, continues: “We have a struggle for the future. There is a struggle to redefine society in Russia. Will the junta win or the people who want freedom? The junta’s agenda has been formulated by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a billionaire owner of the Wagner private military company, who has openly stated in the past: ‘We have built enough bridges and theatres. Everyone in Russia should now work on defence. Russia should be like North Korea for a while. We need a general mobilisation. We must close the borders.

This is the programme of a military junta that will take place before the current president is deposed. The older generation in particular supports Vladimir Putin. The older generation is his base. Lonely and abandoned old people. They want to feel young again and contribute to their country.

Lilia Khanysheva, a 40-year-old woman. She has never killed anyone, never stolen, never committed violence. “If I am sentenced, I will not have time to have children, give me a chance to become a mother,” she said. The judge didn’t give her that chance. She was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison. Cruelty also manifests itself in patriotism. ■



Lilia Chanysheva, a 40-year-old woman. She has never killed anyone, never stolen, never committed violence. This woman said: “If I am sentenced, I will not have time to have children, give me the opportunity to become a mother”. The judge didn’t give her that chance. She was sentenced to 7.5 years imprisonment. Cruelty also manifests itself in patriotism.

THE YOUNG GENERATION IS LEAVING

There is now a whole generation missing in Russia. The generation born after Mikhail Gorbachev is unwilling to sacrifice itself for its homeland. The younger generation will build the future. But many have left the country for good. Almost 1 million people are rebuilding their lives outside Russia. Young people do not want to kill and be killed. I believe that protecting this generation is important not only for Russia, but for all of us.



Nobel Prize-winning Russian journalist Dmitri Andreyevich Muratov worked as a reporter in the mid-1980s after serving in the Soviet army. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, he and his friends founded Novaya Gazeta.

50 MILLION REFUGEES ON THE WAY

Personally, I'm not a scientist, I don't do horoscopes. 50.5 million refugees are on the move. One after the other. 5.5 million Ukrainian children need help. We have to exchange prisoners of war, we have to help refugees.

We need to support UNICEF so that Ukrainian children can return to their families and their homes. The number of orphans and widows must not increase. Russian television shows hundreds of reports a week on the use of nuclear weapons. But will Putin press the button? We don't know. As one soldier said, "Can we meet at 6 o'clock after the war?"

JOURNALISTS ON THE FRONT SHOULD BE REWARDED

There are some great Ukrainian journalists. They made a documentary in Mariupol. They stayed there while the city was being razed to the ground. They shared the fate of the people left behind. They could have died at any moment. These are the journalists who should be rewarded. These are the documentarians who are now filming on the front line, filming the tragedy of this hell. We must support them so that we can meet at 6 o'clock at the end of the war.

PUTIN WILL NOT BE LIKE SADDAM

I will not forgive anyone. Putin will not die like Saddam Hussein. Putin will not give up the advantages of power in a country with nuclear weapons. A country is on a path of increasing militarisation. He sees nuclear weapons as a tool to transform the world from a bipolar to a multipolar world.



EKATERINA GLIKMAN *

We will never back down

Some have freedom without a homeland, others have a homeland without freedom. I hope that sooner or later freedom of expression will be restored in my country. Because there will always be young journalists who want to know the truth and who will bring the truth to the masses.

In the early days of the war against Ukraine, Russia's independent media reached the highest audience and number of followers in its history. Many people wanted to know the truth and be informed about what was happening. People needed to know the facts.

The Russian authorities imposed military censorship. Both the media and the Russian people were forbidden to "call the war a war". It was forbidden to report on this military operation, which the Kremlin called a "special operation", using sources other than official statements.

The staff of Novaya Gazeta, a democratic media outlet in Russia, were faced with a choice. They could either submit to the Kremlin's "censorship laws" and remain in Russia, or go into exile to continue their lives and professions.

Many of our journalist friends could not leave Russia for personal and family reasons. Others were forced to leave Russia. Those who were able to leave Russia founded Novaya Gazeta Europe in April 2022.

The war has divided our team geographically, but in the end we are one family. It is a difficult situation for all of us. Some have freedom without a homeland, others have a homeland without freedom. The attitude of those

who had to leave their country is clear: "If you can't write the truth while living in Russia, you have to write it from outside the country. Because no nation should be left alone with propaganda.

I AM PROUD OF MY TEAM

We have achieved a lot in these 18 months in exile. We started again from scratch with 58 journalists, solving financial, logistical, migration and production problems together. We set up the Novaya Gazeta Europe website, social media accounts and our own newsletters. Our website was blocked within days, along with hundreds of other independent media outlets. But we kept our core readership and continue to reach and build new audiences.

It is worth noting that YouTube has not yet been blocked in Russia. Our videos on YouTube are watched by 6 million people a month. Despite the fact that our website cannot be accessed in Russia without a VPN, our audience reaches 3 million people per month. I am proud of my team, who have contributed a lot to this success.

The Russian authorities have now learned how to block VPN services. So we came up with an alternative plan: we created a special software called "VPNovaya" to help our readers get around the censorship. Our readers outside

164

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, almost all independent media have been banned, blocked and censored. According to RSF's 2023 report, Russia ranks 164th out of 180 countries.

Russia can use their local VPN servers to give access to their friends, family and acquaintances, helping them to open up to the world.

Our video team is making documentaries exposing the war in Russia and the persecution of political activists. We have a special Ukrainian correspondent. He works for us in Kiev. We have published great news from Russia, from the front line and even from the 'occupied' territories.

We regularly translate important news and stories into English. In the past year we have worked with leading European newspapers such as La Stampa in Italy, The Guardian in the UK, TAZ and Frankfurter Allgemeine in Germany to bring the truth to the world.

Of course, all these achievements come at a price. Many of our journalist friends are exhausted and have experienced psychological problems. Many of them are still very young. But the truth is that none of them regret having left their homeland. They all continue to do their jobs.

On 28 June 2023, Russia declared Novaya Gazeta Europe an 'undesirable organisation'. This is just one of many cases of censorship in Russia today. The government labels foreign organisations as undesirable, and punishes citizens who engage with them in any way. A Russian citizen who comments to our reporter in the field or shares our article on social media faces the possibility of being fined and then imprisoned if the offence is repeated. The journalists working for Novaya Gazeta Europe are branded criminals for telling the truth. But if shouting the truth is a crime, we will continue to do so.

It is very important for people to know that they are not alone.

Our colleagues who stayed in Russia are now fighting hard to keep Novaya Gazeta alive. It is a very difficult task. They cannot legally publish our paper and they cannot report on the war. But they continue to publish about other everyday issues that they can write about. Most importantly, they maintain a close relationship with their readers. That gives them tremendous support. It is very important for people who are pro-democracy and against the war to know that they are not alone.

We are often asked, "Is it dangerous to stay in Russia?" Is it dangerous? Yes, it is dangerous. For example, in July this year our colleague Elena Milashina was brutally beaten

in Chechnya. Last year, Dmitry Muratov was attacked on a train. He was sprayed with acetone paint.

Unfortunately, the situation is not much different for our journalist friends living in Europe. Novaya Gazeta correspondent Elena Kostyuchenko was poisoned in Munich last year. She was targeted, probably by people working for the Kremlin, in revenge for her reporting from the war zone.

There is no guarantee that journalists forced to make a living in Russia will not have their homes raided in the early hours of the morning by armed men or be arrested. Yet we have many professional friends who have not lost their professional dignity. As for those whose sole purpose is propaganda, I think they are no longer journalists.

A HIGH PRICE HAS BEEN PAID

It takes great courage to continue telling the truth in Russia. And it comes with great risks. The 2021 Nobel Prize for Novaya Gazeta and Dimirty Muratov came at a high price. Six of its staff were murdered. All of these murders took place during Putin's rule.

In the immediate aftermath of these terrible tragedies, there was always someone who stepped forward to carry on the work left behind by our fallen colleagues. Strange as it may sound, I have hope that sooner or later freedom of expression will be restored in my country. Because there will never be a shortage of young journalists who want to know the truth and who will bring the truth to the masses.

WE WILL NEVER GO BACK

I can promise on behalf of myself and my team that we will continue our work and our resistance. We will never forget the vulnerable political prisoners. Until they are released, we will continue to inform the world by reporting on them.

From a professional point of view, we understand that it is a great privilege to be able to produce and make a difference in exile. This is how we resist the chaos of war. We will never give up on this issue. ■

** Ekaterina Glikman, deputy editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta Europe. She is a journalist with Novaya Gazeta, Russia's main independent newspaper, which criticises the Kremlin's policies. She lives in exile in Switzerland.*

RUSSIAN BLACK PROPAGANDA:

WATCH OUT! FAKE NEWS!

Russia is using Ukrainian media, especially journalists, as a tool of black propaganda with fake news. Popular websites are copied with the same domain name and design. The only difference is the extension of the web address.



IRYNA SYNELNYK *

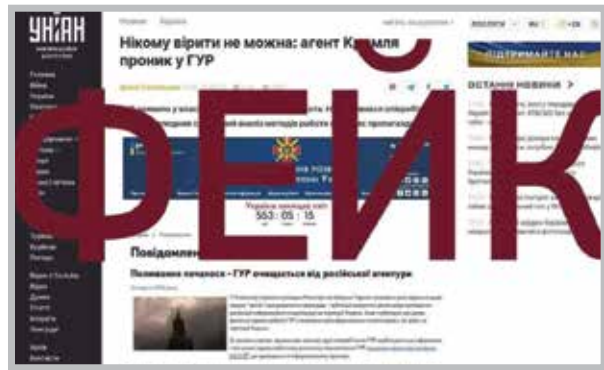
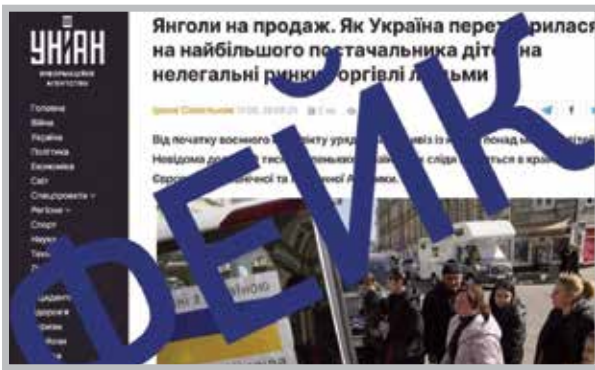
Russia is using Ukrainian media, especially journalists, as a tool of black propaganda through fake news websites and fake news. I became aware of this propaganda tool when a fake article using my name was created on a fake website.

As a journalist, I worked for many years for the Ukrainian information agency UNIAN. Last year I joined the Kosovo Residency Programme and I live in Pristina. I still work for the Ukrainian media. During the ongoing war in Ukraine, I was digitally attacked by unknown persons who linked my name to fake news. I believe that those who did this represent the interests of Russia as a propaganda tool. These facts are not only a risk to the professional reputation of the journalist, but also a threat to the national security of the country.

FAKE NEWS AND A BAD EXPERIENCE

I received a message from my fact-checking colleagues at Behind the News (<https://behindthenews.ua/en/>), a project that focuses on disinformation and fake news. They sent me links to several fake articles signed with my name. To my surprise and shock, the website using my name was fake, but it looked very similar to the original. The colours, fonts, design and visuals were the same. The articles were written by someone fluent in Ukrainian, so it wasn't a Google translation. In the early days of the war, Russian propaganda materials were translated by Google's translation tools, and they contained many errors and ambiguities. But the pages I am talking about were professionally produced.

The fake site focused on problems in the



Ukrainian army and negotiations with Russia. There were also reports about the black-market trade in Ukrainian children's organs, corruption in Ukraine and the cessation of arms supplies by Western allies. These are very sensitive issues that affect not only Ukrainians but Europeans as well.

The original UNIAN website is <https://www.unian.ua/>. The fake site has the domain name "org" and the original articles have "html" at the end, not "php". These are details that a reader would not notice by clicking on this page.

I think the biggest mistake is that these fake articles were shared on Facebook as advertisements. Some users (perhaps propaganda bots) shared these materials and wrote about treason during the war. For example, in August I received a private message from an unknown person about the abuse of a pro-Russian position. I couldn't make sense of it.

I appealed to the Security Service of Ukraine, the Cyber Police and the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine to shut down these sites. The fake websites have been blocked, but they are still somehow accessible.

"TREASON" ADS

Oksana Zabuzhko, a famous Ukrainian writer, said that fake articles advertised on Facebook were "treason". She wrote about this on her special Facebook page. She reposted sources of true news from her project On the Other Side of News. His facts were reposted nearly 500 times and reached up to 40,000 people.

Fact-checkers from the Behind the News project point out that Russian propaganda is becoming more widespread through promoted posts on Facebook.

The news feed is literally overflowing with paid posts labelled as advertisements. All of them contain "treason and outright lies". The project's fact-checkers summarise some of these stories as follows: "Ukraine's government is mired in corruption; Western aid is "going down the drain"; the army cannot withstand Russian missile attacks and must urgently come to the negotiating table; conscripts are being sent to the slaughter without training".

The fake websites are created by copying popular websites that the public follows closely, with the same domain name and design. The only difference is the extension of

the web address. For example, a fake website pretending to be the publication of Obozrevatel has the domain name 'ltd', while the real website has the domain name 'com'. After posting fake materials signed by real employees on these websites, the articles are distributed through an advertising algorithm on the Ukrainian sections of Facebook.

In March, the editorial office of RBC - Ukraine contacted the cyber police about the forgery of websites and fake documents criticising the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Valery Zaluzhny. In April, prominent Ukrainian journalist Pavlo Kazarin alleged that he had been subjected to an information attack. Ukrainian Pravda revealed that a cloned website had published a column in his name and contacted the Security Service of Ukraine.

The reviewers blocked fake websites that imitated popular media sites in Ukraine, such as Suspilne News, Television News Service, Ukrainian Pravda, Obozrevatel, 24 Chanel, RBC-Ukraine, UNIAN, UNN and others.

Media lawyer Igor Rozkladai noted that Internet technology is a popular tool in Russia's propaganda, where a copy of popular websites or the section that is supposed to be simulated is falsified. If you go to the site, all the links are real(!) Even if you go to the links within the page, you can go to the original site and the author's page. The only thing that makes it obvious that it is fake is the extension of the domain name. The main purpose of this cloning is to discredit the media and the journalist by luring you to a false publication.

There is no doubt that Russian propaganda works well and they do not hesitate to use any method or tool. While simple lies are fine for local audiences, Ukrainians and Europeans are looking for more sophisticated means of manipulation.

Media literacy is important in war. The information front in hybrid warfare is complex and sometimes based on emotion, but it requires considerable mental work. I am sure that not only journalists, but everyone needs to pay attention to details and research primary sources. ■

** Journalist Iryna Synelnyk has worked for the UNIAN information agency since 2005. She currently works as a journalist for Ukrainian media. She covers political and social issues and topics related to the Russian occupation of Ukraine.*



OKSANA CHYKANCHY *

Only facts can counter fake news

There are hundreds of sites in the digital world where Russia is involved and manipulated. But this does not mean that we journalists should sit back and do nothing. We will fight hard for the truth. As they say, the truth is like the sun: it can be hidden, but only for a while.

I have been a journalist in Kosovo for over a year now and I am very concerned that fake news is taking over the digital world like an epidemic. Unfortunately, the process continues to snowball because those who spread megabytes of lies do not take responsibility. In my early days in Kosovo, I started to actively work on the issue of fake news as a weapon in the information war, because in the 24 years since independence, the region has been bombarded with disinformation from hundreds of online and media outlets. The onslaught of ongoing Serbian-Russian propaganda is, of course, determined by its foreign policy.

In order to examine the issue of fake news in more detail, I began monitoring news published in a number of media outlets between 1 June and 15 September 2023. A striking example of how fake news reaches readers and can be detected and exposed is the content of the Russian-language channel “Balkanist” on Telegram. The channel frequently mentions Kosovo. The 20,000 subscribers to the channel know Kosovo as a horrible, cruel monster, with

fake and distorted news that touches the nerve endings. As journalists, it is our duty to expose this fake news and present the truth.

To fully analyse fake news, a journalist needs to master the basics of psychology, artificial intelligence and the subcategory of linguistics, such as natural language processing (NLP), semiotics, imageology and many other fields of knowledge. As a journalist myself, I have been interested in these sciences for many years. Lies are diverse and creative. Disinformation armies participate in information wars and many of them attack very professionally.

A detailed analysis of the Balkanist channel on Telegram shows that for 4.5 months it published dozens of false facts about Kosovo and its leaders. The name of Kosovo, with the word “president” in quotation marks, the phrases “self-proclaimed independent country”, the “so-called” Kosovo Liberation Army and Kosovo under NATO occupation are frequently used. These phrases are often repeated like a slogan on the channel, which is watched by thousands of people.

It is important not only to provide infor-

mation, but also to keep in touch with readers. This is why “special” topics are presented with viral, catchy headlines, a light tone, an intonation of confidence and often humour.

Even with such heavy metaphors, a mix of reality and fantasy, it is not so easy to fool the channel’s subscribers. As a result, readers’ sober assessments are often found in the comments below the posts. For example, user Kirk Toch wrote on 5 September: “I want independent media, independent news, but like Channel 1, like 10 years ago. The emphasis on what happened in the past has changed, it’s like repetition”.

So far we have only talked about the ideology of the channel. Now let’s look at the fake programmes that are conveniently interspersed with Balkanist’s content. The latest of these is an attempt to analyse the problems in the Balkans by piling one lie on top of another. Here are a few examples:

Why is the West silent while Kurti lights the fire of “Greater Albania”? Nikola Belich 07.09.2023: One of the most common expressions in the West regarding “independent Kosovo” is the concept of “young democracy”. Recently it has been proven once again that it has been transformed into the old fascist project of “Greater Albania”.

LIE: This project does not reflect reality and does not exist. It is an invention of the Serbs and Serbia, who blame others for the projects they prepared and tried to implement during the break-up of the former Yugoslav federation.

“Albin Kurti, the prime minister of the quasi-state formation in Pristina, and his extremist supporters have confirmed that they are a threat not only to Serbia but to the entire Balkan region, especially northern Macedonia.

LIE: Kosovo’s independence is the process of becoming a factor of stability and security in the Balkans. All the Balkan countries, with the exception of Bosnia because of Serbia and the Serbian blockade, have recognised the newly created country and all are communicating normally on the basis of friendly and equal relations.

“Before arriving in Tetovo, Kurti visited Skopje, where he attended a ceremony to name one of the city’s streets after Adem Demachi, known as the “political father” of the country. The Macedonian authorities met with supporters of the extremist ideologue Demachi and announced their honourable approval of the naming of this street. Instead of gratitude, a flag was raised threatening to annex more than half

of the country from Macedonia to Albania. Some time later, however, the authorities in Skopje launched an investigation and issued an arrest warrant for the person who removed the controversial symbol. A step that was long overdue. If Demachi and the street hadn’t been renamed in his honour, the threatening flag probably wouldn’t have appeared.

LIE: The event was held in honour of Demachi. The political OTOKTHONOUS flag was never raised. So these two issues are completely separate.

“During his time in prison, teacher Kurti is remembered as too radical even by the communist standards of Yugoslavia, which was very tolerant of Albanians.”

LIE: Communist Yugoslavia was certainly not tolerant of Albanians. Albanians were persecuted, deported, imprisoned and killed in Yugoslavia.

The contributions and corrections were made by Afrim Hoti, a professor of political science at the University of Pristina. He easily edited and published the 17 false news stories, which were rife with fake news. Together with Prof. Hoti’s explanations, it was possible to expose several obviously fake posts on the Balkanist channel, whose content I had been monitoring for some time, by translating them into English with the help of the best expert in Kosovo. Moreover, Prof. Afrim Hoti dramatically analysed where there were lies (most of the posts) and where there were truthful posts (very few). But we are only talking about a few posts from the Balkanist website. There are hundreds of distorted posts on that site.

Besides, there are hundreds of similar sites in the digital world where Russia is involved and manipulated. But this does not mean that we journalists should sit back and do nothing. We will fight hard for the truth. As they say, the truth is like the sun; it can be hidden, but only for a while. ■

** Oksana Chykanchy is a member of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine and has worked professionally in various media organisations for more than 30 years. As a television journalist, she presented a popular author programme on business for a regional TV company. Later, she became the public relations manager of the I&U Group holding company and worked with the media as a freelancer. She is currently living in Kosovo as part of the International Programme for the Protection of Ukrainian Journalists.*



XHEMAJL REXHA *

Balkan media resist

The work of journalists and media in the Western Balkans is under constant scrutiny. The media are targeted by governments and interest groups. In recent years, around 2,000 attacks on the media have been recorded in 6 Western Balkan countries and Croatia.

The media in the Balkans, including Kosovo, has played a key role in the democratic development of the countries since the bloody wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, started by former Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic. Political parties and governments have always wanted to intervene in the media and use their influence, and they have always succeeded. They have often pursued nationalist agendas at odds with other nations in the region. In Kosovo, most of the pressure has been on the public broadcaster RTK, which for many years served in many ways the ruling Kosovo Democratic Party of former President Hashim Thaci. Otherwise, private independent media have been able to do their work, albeit under economic and political pressure, and hold those in power to account. In Albania, nearly 90 per cent of the media have been linked in one way or another to the ruling Socialist Party of Prime Minister Rama for more than a decade, while the situation is even worse in Serbia, where only 3-4 media outlets out of

hundreds are outside the control of President Aleksandar Vucic and the ruling SNS. In northern Macedonia, the media enjoyed a new sense of freedom after Nikola Gruevski of the VMRO DPMNE fled the country following an arrest warrant issued against him on corruption charges.

SELF-REGULATORY SYSTEM IN THE KOSOVO MEDIA

Hundreds of media outlets operate in Kosovo, most of them registered as businesses, some of them NGOs. There is no state control of the media in Kosovo. The Independent Media Commission, an independent body elected by the Kosovo Assembly, monitors TV and radio content and deals with complaints. The Kosovo Press Council is a self-regulatory body that monitors the content of online media following the closure of all print media in the country. The current Kosovo government appears to be trying to gain control over the public broadcaster, RTK, by cutting its annual budget from €16 million to €8 million.

VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

The work of journalists and media in the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, is under constant scrutiny and attack from politicians, governments and interest groups of all kinds. In recent years, the Safe Journalist Regional Network has recorded nearly 2,000 attacks in six Western Balkan countries and Croatia.

Attacks range from physical assaults, as in northern Kosovo this year, to all forms of threats, intimidation and online harassment. Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo recorded the highest number of attacks, while Northern Macedonia recorded the fewest. Most attacks come from the ruling parties in each country, with the president, prime minister and MPs organising smear campaigns against journalists. This is most common in Serbia and Albania, and more recently in Kosovo.

We see the attacks on journalists as an attempt to undermine freedom of expression and media freedom in Kosovo. For example, Valon Sylja, a journalist and founder of the online news portal 'Gazeta Metro', was physically attacked in April for mocking the luxurious life of Muslim imams in Kosovo in a Facebook post. This is a clear example of how freedom of expression is under attack, and civil society in Kosovo has consistently raised its voice in defence of this freedom.

In the five-week period from 26 May to 30 June, the Kosovo Journalists' Association recorded 29 attacks on journalists in Serb-majority North Mitrovica, Leposavic, Zveçan and Zubin Potok. Journalists and media teams were physically assaulted by masked gangs while reporting, their equipment was destroyed and their cars set on fire. The worst attacks took place on 16 June in Leposavic, where 9 media workers were assaulted and RTK cameraman Bardh Bekteshi was kicked to the ground.

AJK and journalists have been in contact with institutions to express our concerns about the safety of journalists in the country. We have asked the government to adopt a strategy with concrete steps on how journalists can best do their work in a safe environment. We ask the judiciary

MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL MEDIA

Kosovo has a variety of news organisations broadcasting in Albanian, Serbian, Roma, Bosnian, Turkish and other languages. Serbian-language media are concentrated in northern Kosovo (Kossev, Radio Kosovska Mitrovica, Radio Kontakt Plus, TV Mir, TV Most and others). Various studies show that the majority of the 60,000 Kosovo Serbs use the Serbian media in Belgrade as their main source of information. So they are the target of propaganda not only from Serbia but also from Russia, with Russia Today opening RT Balkans in Belgrade.

Unfortunately, in recent days and in the age of social platforms, we have seen that the media, including the mainstream ones, have often shied away from the process of respecting ethics in reporting. This is the era of "click-bait", which sometimes leads to inaccurate reporting by the media. However, there are still 2-3 large, reputable media outlets in each country that preserve the essence of journalism for professional reporting in the public interest.

to consistently prioritise cases of attacks on journalists, recognising that the work of journalists is of the highest public interest. We have seen some small steps, mostly from the prosecutor's office, but not much has changed in practice.

SELF-CENSORSHIP

Many media outlets, including in Kosovo, often practice self-censorship rather than censorship. Due to different economic interests, the media tend to avoid reporting on certain topics or issues related to people or institutions with which they are associated. Censorship appears to be practised in Serbia, Albania and the Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, opposition protests in the Serbian capital, Belgrade, were ignored by most of the pro-regime media.

In each country, different actors are trying to intervene. Russia and then China are the main malign foreign actors trying to use their influence. Again, this is most visible in Serbia and Sputnik, which is based in the country. ■

** Xhemajl Rexha is the Chairman of the Board of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK), which has more than 900 members in Kosovo. From 2005 to 2020, he worked at the national private broadcaster KTV (Kohavision) in various positions, including editor-in-chief, and presented the programme Interaktiv, dealing with current affairs. Since 2020, he continues to be the Information Director and host of the "Prime Time" programme at Channel 10.*



“THIS PHOTO PUT ME IN PRISON FOR 2 YEARS”



HAMDİYE ÇİFTÇİ ÖKSÜZ

Tt may be difficult for those who live in democratic countries to understand, but what happened is very real. As a journalist, I took the photo above and was imprisoned for two years.

I am a Kurdish journalist, a woman and a mother of two children, who has been in prison

for 2 years and on trial for 13 years because of the news I reported, the photos and videos I took.

Being a woman journalist in the Kurdish majority region of Turkey means wearing a shirt of fire. Every day when you leave the house, you say goodbye to your loved ones as if you were dying. Because you live in a place where you never know what is going to happen, what is going to happen to you. If you do not conform to the existing system, they try to make you conform through pressure and intimidation. If they don't get what they want from you, they threaten you, and if that doesn't work, they either kill you or send you to prison.

When I went to Çukurca in Hakkari to follow cross-border operations, I experienced my first imprisonment. After that, I got used to threats and surveillance that I will never forget. I also got used to people with sly smiles waiting in front of

In a democratic country rights and freedoms documentary evidence of torture that I revealed the picture when I should have received an award for it, unfortunately he was imprisoned for 2 years. I stayed. I've been on trial for years and my files were quoted. I was fired from my job. I was rewarded!

my house when I left home in the morning, so that I could feel their breath on my neck at every moment of my life in the bazaar and on the street. I have also learned to ignore death threats.

WITNESSING CÜNEYT'S BROKEN ARM

On 22 March 2008, the Peace and Democracy Party held a Nowruz celebration without a permit. The police intervened with tear gas and armoured vehicles and arrested some demonstrators. The police dragged a child. They were beating and torturing the child in front of us. The child had lost his voice from crying. As the policeman twisted the arm of the child, who was writhing in his hands, the sound of his arm breaking was captured on my camera. We had witnessed the breaking of a child's arm in the middle of the street. These images were broadcast on world television a few days later. The child had come to the bazaar to buy bread, was arrested and then tortured in this way. A few days after these pictures were published, my house was raided. My tapes, personal belongings, computer, tape recorder and books were confiscated. The three policemen who broke the boy's arm filed a criminal complaint against me, and then I was detained and arrested.

My camera was considered to be a weapon. In the prosecutor's indictment, Cüneyt Ertuğ's pictures were considered unreal. After 14 months, I was able to see my 840-page indictment three days before the trial. I was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for "being a member of an armed terrorist organisation and making propaganda for it". Two years after being brought before a judge five times, I was released on bail on the fifth occasion.

I continued my work in prison, compiling and writing about the events I had witnessed. I interviewed and questioned sick prisoners, imprisoned politicians, imprisoned children. I continued my journalism by sending letters to the newspaper. And I left the prison I entered as a journalist as a writer. I

wrote the book "Women and Dungeon", a collection of women's stories.

After my release, I wanted to make a new start in life, so I finished the child development programme at Hakkâri University that I had left unfinished. After graduating, I started working as a kindergarten teacher. On the other hand, my trials continued. New investigations were opened because of the messages I had written and I was constantly called to the police station to testify. The Ankara Public Prosecutor's Office opened another case against me and my six journalist friends. The government-controlled Yeni Akit newspaper targeted me with a headline saying "These are not journalists, they are terrorists".

I was dismissed from my job as a teacher by a state of emergency decree based on my arrest and the Cüneyt Ertuğ case. My phones are still tapped and I am under constant surveillance. 3 separate cases have been filed against me based on Cüneyt Ertuğ, whose 14-year-old arm was broken when I took his photograph. I was sentenced to 1.5 years in prison in one case and the other case has been going on for 13 years. The case against me has been postponed every two months for years.

In this country, you can be sued for the news you write and you can go to jail. You walk around with your heart in your mouth. You never know what will happen to you. Especially if you are a mother of two small children, these worries increase. As you know, hundreds of Kurdish journalists are in exile and dozens are in prison.

In a democratic country, I should have received an award for publishing the picture of a tortured child, which is an important document for human rights and freedoms, but unfortunately I was imprisoned for 2 years. I have been on trial for years and I have been rewarded by being sacked from my job because of my files (!) In addition, my younger sister has been sacked from her job as a nurse because of the files against me. No one in my family has a job because of this. I don't even have a lawyer to defend me. My lawyer, who volunteered to defend me while I was in prison, withdrew from the case. Another demanded a large payment.

My book "Woman and Dungeon / The imprisonment of a journalist" was confiscated. I cannot find a publisher for another book because they are afraid. What we say is forbidden, what we do is a crime. These experiences alone are a clear example of the level of freedom of the press and freedom of expression, as well as the judiciary and the scales of justice in Turkey. In short, I did a news report and everything happened to me. I became a journalist, I was arrested. I became a teacher, I was sacked. I wrote a book, it was confiscated.

They don't even let me breathe. Even though the government does not consider me a journalist, I will continue to do my job as a journalist and write the truth. ■

Freedom of the press is not the **only problem in Colombia,** there are no ethical values either!

The Colombian government requires journalists to submit their questions in writing and decides whether or not to answer them, or censors journalists by holding press conferences months later.



SALOMÉ SALDARRIAGA J. *

Press freedom in Colombia continues to appear in dark orange in the latest Reporters Without Borders index. This colour represents the “difficult situation” of the country, which is ranked 139 out of 180 countries analysed. This is interpreted by many as a sign that Colombian journalists are being killed, threatened or physically attacked. While these are some of the main reasons why Colombia is one of the most dangerous countries for journalists in South America, other less talked about but persistent pressures faced by local journalists include lack of income, excessive working hours, low pay, abuse of freelancers, editorial pressure, lack of credibility and censorship.

Journalist Felipe Abondano said: ‘The debate on press freedom should take place in local media offices and among working journalists. They can raise the pressure they face from media bosses both to publish and not to publish their stories’.

Felipe Abondano is one of the few Colombian journalists working with international media who can best analyse local Colombian issues. A

freelance photographer and journalist for both local and international media, Abondano, a university professor, has, like most journalists, juggled multiple sources of income due to the difficult economic realities of the profession. It was through drone photography that he first met his current employer. After 7 years, he is still working for the international media organisation Deutsche Welle (DW). Although he no longer has to face some of the realities that journalists in the local media face, he still has to face them every day.

Having travelled all over the country, from remote rural areas to concrete jungles, Abondano has plenty of experience of personal protection and security risks in a country with a history of armed conflict, illegal armed groups and organised crime. A few years ago, while covering protests across the country, he was even shot with a tear-gas canister by Colombia’s riot police, the ESMAD, despite wearing a vest marked ‘press’. But after all that has happened to him, Abondano emphasises something else when he talks about press freedom in his country, Colombia. He talks



about the lack of ethics and the deterioration of the journalistic profession.

But to understand the root of the problem, it is necessary to understand the choices made by the media bosses, the decision-makers. In the Colombian scenario, large corporations with interests in other businesses control influential media outlets throughout the country. Behind the local headquarters of the largest local and even international media are Colombia's wealthy elite and conglomerates. As Abondano points out in his recent examples, the country's rich or influential families can acquire subsidiaries of large media conglomerates as if they were franchises of the Subway fast food franchise.

Gilinski, Sarmiento Angulo, Santo Domingo, Ardilla Lülle. These are some of the rich and influential families at the head of the country's most powerful sources of information. These businessmen are also the owners of banks, restaurants, insurance companies, sports teams and other large companies involved in all kinds of financial activities.

"Imagine you are Mr Sarmiento or Mr Santo Domingo. You come to local journalists and say: 'My business - sugar cane, African palm oil, cattle ranching - is more profitable than yours. You see journalists as your playthings, don't you? You will only publish what you want, and if journalists don't like it, there will be mass sackings, threats, fights. This is a real degradation of the profession.

As Abondano points out above, journalists are censored because of the bosses' financial interests, but this is only one of many forms of repression. The government censors journalists by requiring them to submit questions in writing and deciding whether or not to answer them, or by holding press conferences months later. Politicians or influential businessmen may pressure media outlets not to publish a story against them. Post-publication reactions can censor journalists. For example, Abondano, who said a general threatened him for publishing a story, is just one journalist who has ex-

perienced this. Journalists may even decide not to pursue certain stories because they know editors will not publish them - in short, self-censorship.

Many journalists quit their jobs because of this kind of pressure and censorship. Three years ago, *Semana*, one of the country's biggest magazines, was restructured after being bought by a banking billionaire, and many journalists had to leave their jobs. Some of Abondano's close friends have yet to find new jobs; others, tired of fighting a losing battle and struggling to make ends meet, have moved on to other companies. As he put it: "I wonder how many people have been silenced for fear of being sacked? How many great journalists have we lost?"

And then there are those who have been left behind. Abondano argues that local media do not provide the necessary conditions and guarantees for journalists to work in peace. In addition, he says, journalists are forced to work in difficult conditions, with six-day workdays and on-call duty on holidays. Salaries for journalists in Colombia are very low compared to other professions. Not to mention the vulnerability of freelancers to abuses such as low hourly wages, security issues, legal loopholes and constant requests to work for free in the hope of eventually being hired.

Abondano reminds us that there are still well-known local and international media who owe him for his work.

However, his work, especially his photographs and video footage, is used indiscriminately by many media outlets without regard for copyright and property rights. "There is no ethics, no respect," Felipe Abondano reacts, explaining that they say they are in an economic crisis when they publish them.

The economic crisis has led local journalists to rely on their phones and Twitter instead of reporting from the people or on the ground. These are costs that media owners don't want to pay anyway, he adds: "So the quality of our journalism is very low and we are at the mercy of fake news."

"I think the biggest danger is that people for whom publishing is in their soul and who love to tell stories are always looking for ways to cut costs in this profession, rather than some bank owners who want to buy newspapers to see how they can do business with them, which is expensive and which secures a minimum part of our democracy." ■

** Salomé Saldarriaga J, freelance journalist and editor of Journalist Post | Communications and Events Specialist Front Line Defenders | CNN Academy & UCD - MA in Journalism and International Relations.*



Turkey's Dreyfus Mehmet Baransu in jail for 3168 days

Alfred Dreyfus. In 1894, the perpetrator of what became known as the Dreyfus Affair was a French officer. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, arrested on suspicion of spying for the Germans, was acquitted after 12 years in prison without charge. The French President apologised to him, his stripped ranks were restored and he was awarded the Légion d'honneur, France's highest civilian decoration.

While Alfred Dreyfus lived his life within four walls and without the means to defend himself, his family and the world-famous writer Émile Zola showed him loyalty and support. His wife's efforts to keep the case on the agenda and Zola's famous article "I accuse", written to the French president, ensured that the forgotten Dreyfus case was reopened and justice was served, albeit years later. Because of this article, Zola was forced to leave his country.

Today, journalist Mehmet Baransu is experiencing one of the hundreds of similar cases in history. Accused of "espionage and revealing state secrets", Baransu, who has been in jail for years, is not as lucky as Dreyfus. There is not a single journalist, intellectual or writer in the whole country to proclaim his innocence (apart from his wife, his family and a few friends). And for years he has been forgotten between the four walls of the prison...

This journalist, who writes articles for the institutionalisation of democracy in the country, whose news are among the news of the century, who receives awards, who is not afraid and does not give up in the face of power, should be honoured, but more than 140 lawsuits have been filed against him and more than a thousand years of imprisonment have been requested. He has been in prison for 3,168 days... (as of 2 November 2023) It is not known whether Baransu will be given a badge of honour after years like Dreyfus. But today is the day of Émile Zola. ►



GÜLİZAR BAKI



İSMAİL SAĞIROĞLU



ŞEMSİ AÇIKGÖZ

Mehmet Baransu

The son of a Kurdish family from Ardahan, Mehmet Baransu was born in İğdır in 1977. He received his bachelor's degree from Istanbul University, Faculty of Communication. He lived in the USA for three and a half years to complete his Master's degree and to study languages.

He has worked for the 32. Gün Programme, Akşam and Hürriyet newspapers, Aksiyon magazine and Cihan news agency. More than 140 complaints have been filed against Baransu for his publications. Since his arrest on 2 March 2015, none of Baransu's news articles have been disproved.

The article "He pulled the pin and gave the bomb", published in the Taraf newspaper, was listed by Professor Anya Schiffrin of Columbia University as one of the 47 most important investigative news stories of the last 100 years.

"That's How Those Four Soldiers Died: He Pulled the Pin and Gave the Bomb" also won the 2009 Sedat Simavi Journalism Award.

Baransu is the author of three books, Karargâh, Mösyö and Pirus.

His pregnant wife lost her baby due to the stress and pressure Baransu was under during his arrest.

THE COST OF COURAGE

9 YEARS IN JAIL

"I have been paying for my courage in solitary confinement for 8.5 years. If I hadn't. I can't expect anyone to have the courage I have. But the state of my country - and I'm sorry I paid that price. These people aren't worth it.

Break down the door, we will decriminalise what you have done". In developed democracies it is extremely difficult to understand such a sentence and such an action by a minister. But it is possible in countries where any news a journalist publishes is a death sentence or imprisonment;

In an audio recording that surfaced online in 2014, Efkan Ala, Turkey's then interior minister, told Hüseyin Avni Mutlu, the then governor of Istanbul, "Break down his door and take him away. We don't even need a court ruling here. We have 50 per cent of the votes. We can make a law and decriminalise what you have done, don't be afraid of the prosecutor". The reason given is Baransu's news reports. He says he urgently needs to be silenced so that his illegal activities are not exposed. In fact, Baransu has been silenced for 9 years. The government silenced him by imprisoning him between four walls, his colleagues silenced him by hiding between ideological

walls. As his lawyer Çiğdem Koç says on every platform, there are many prejudices against Baransu. A prejudice that, according to Koç, even amounts to "immorality". There is also an astonishing amount of information pollution. Ideological hatred is spread through events, news and discourses that have nothing to do with Baransu. And neither Baransu, his family nor his lawyer can correct these judgements. It is as if 'Baransu hatred' is being deliberately spread and a lynch campaign is being waged.

But what we have here is a profile of a journalist whose stories are among the news of the century, who fights against patronage and corruption, who is not afraid of any power, who does not give up and who risks death. We wanted to tell the story of Baransu, a name that will go down in the history of journalism, through his news reports and what he said in the courts where he was tried. We leave it to Baransu's life story and news reports. The interpretation is up to the reader..

■ CONSPIRATOR AND SUITCASE JOURNALIST

Many people describe Baransu as “the conspirator in the Balyoz case and a journalist with a suitcase”. However, Baransu was never put on trial for Balyoz and the documents that form the basis of the evidence in the Balyoz trial are not documents that Baransu handed over to the judicial authorities. Besides, what journalist would not accept such information after verifying its accuracy and not report on such important information? So far, none of the documents in Baransu’s news reports have been found to be forged or false. The accuracy of the documents has also been accepted by the official organs of the state. He has not been convicted or even tried for conspiracy.

■ THE ONLY CASE HE HAS BEEN

ARRESTED FOR: CANCEROUS RICE NEWS

There is an expression in Turkish: “separating the rice from the stone”. It is used to describe difficult and complex situations. Separating the falsehoods and prejudices in Baransu’s journalism from the facts is exactly like this saying. There are more stones than rice here, and it is so difficult to find the rice among the stones!

The cost of a journalist’s concern for public health is 19.5 years in prison. In 2013, cancer-causing GMO rice was imported with a forged report obtained through bribery. The then customs minister Hayati Yazıcı organised an operation against these people in 2013. Eight businessmen close to the AKP were arrested. The operation made headlines in all the newspapers. Mehdi Eker, the Minister of Agriculture at the time, criticised the operation by saying “the rice is not GMO”. Minister Yazıcı spoke again and said “The rice is GMO”. The headlines in the newspapers were “Which minister should we believe? The AKP was confused by this operation. Some politicians intervened and got the businessmen released. But the cases filed in 2013 ended in 2015 and they were sentenced to prison for “bringing in GMO rice with false reports”. The Court of Cassation upheld the sentence in 2019. So what is Baransu’s connection to these events that have kept him in prison for years?

Baransu’s news report tells what happened in the lobbies of Ankara after these events. The source of the news is one of Erdoğan’s former advisers. After the publication of the report, which describes the games played in the Ministry of Agriculture over this rice, the bribes given, the misleading of the then Prime Minister Erdoğan and the fight of Minister Yazıcı against these people, some of the businessmen mentioned in the report withdrew the report and accused it of “slander and insult”.

on the grounds that the report fell within the scope of press freedom. The Public Prosecutor’s Office stated that the news was within the freedom of the press and did not press charges. Baransu’s brother Ahmet Baransu, who has followed Baransu’s trial in detail, describes it as “one of the most unlawful cases in the history of the Republic” and it is very surprising that Baransu is being sued over the GMO rice issue. Ahmet Baransu describes the trial as follows: “The prosecutor did not issue a criminal complaint for the news published in 2013, saying that it was ‘within the scope of press freedom.’ However, the same prosecutor issued a new indictment in



Ahmet Baransu states that his brother was left alone in prison.

“I WISH I WASN’T SO BRAVE”

Mehmet Baransu gave an interview to the Ahval newspaper. Some lines from the interview are as follows

THE JOURNALIST IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE ACCURACY

You ask me how I got these documents. I got those documents because I reported the news and didn’t let the case fade away. A journalist cares about the accuracy not the source. My courage costed me in solitary confinement for 8.5 years, I wish I wasn’t so brave.

I WAS LEFT ALONE, I DON’T EXPECT ANYTHING.

I was left alone in prison. People, including former managers of the Taraf newspaper, were afraid to open their mouths. Some sent me messages saying: ‘We’re sorry, we couldn’t be there for you. If we say anything, they will arrest us too’.

WHAT IS THE MEDIA REPORTING CORRECTLY?

The media is not reporting anything properly. Some are afraid. Some left journalism and became party spokesmen. Some see the events through the lens of their own neighbourhood. I have nothing to say. But the journalists in my trials know that mine is not a case of conspiracy, but of obtaining and publishing secret documents. Yet, they go out and report the news as a “conspiracy case”.

NOT WORTH IT

I cannot expect the courage I have from anyone. When I was making these news, I thought every day that there might be a bomb in my car, that it might be my last day, but I didn’t back down. The price was imprisonment. When I look my country, I feel sorry for paying that price. It is not worth it for these people.

SO THAT THEIR CRIMES WOULD NOT BE EXPOSED...

People whose sins don’t fit in the bag want me to be in prison. They want to blame me and get rid of their crimes so they are never revealed. Balyozists, the government, journalists, intellectuals, they all know their crimes.

2015 for ‘attempting to overthrow the government and leading a terrorist organisation’. Yes, journalists can report the news and be questioned by the judiciary, but this case and imprisonment are intended to make Baransu worse than death. Many human rights violations have been and are being committed during this trial. For example, the use of a car that is not suitable for long journeys in cold weather. They take my brother to another city in a prison car for tens of hours and do not allow him to wear winter clothes. A dirty mattress was thrown into a flooded toilet and he was asked to sleep on it. He spent two days in this cell with a broken window. They are just torturing him. They are also using false and fabricated evidence to keep him in prison. For example, in the GMO case, my brother was arrested on the basis of a confession. The confessor said: ‘I picked up Baransu at the airport and took him to a tea garden, where the police officers close to the cult gave him information and documents’, and my brother was arrested. But the interesting thing is that when the confessor said he had done this, it turned out that he was being held in Afyon prison. In other words, this is a false confessor. Furthermore, Mehmet Baransu was sentenced for using Bylock, even though it was confirmed by the expert report appointed by the court that he did not use the Bylock programme and this report is available in his file.” ▶



Mehmet Baransu's lawyer Çiğdem Koç:

Journalists' behaviour towards Baransu will be remembered as a disgrace

"Baransu has been in prison for almost 9 years and the behaviour of journalists, journalist organisations and rights defenders will go down in history as a disgrace. Except for a few names. Under these circumstances, it is meaningless to say that journalism is not a crime when they feel like it".

Cawyer Çiğdem Koç took on the defence of journalist Mehmet Baransu at a difficult time. With her legendary speeches, she refuted all the claims made by the court. She declared Baransu's innocence not only in court but at every opportunity she could find. "In all the cases in which Mehmet Baransu is on trial, a name is on trial, not a crime," said lawyer Koç and answered our questions as follows.

Mehmet Baransu had some lawyers before, but they left the case later. Why did you put your hand under the stone?

I had already followed Baransu's arrest and trial - if you can call it a trial - closely. As a lawyer who knows how the judiciary works in Turkey in general, I was also aware that this trial was taking place in a way that restricted the right to defence, the right to a fair trial and ignored universal principles of law. I think another issue that interested me at least as

much was that I saw how much the public pontificated, knowing so little, and I was very angry about it, as I always am. At that time, we used to meet and greet Baransu during prison visits, but since I was informed that he had a lawyer, I was content with just watching him, writing about him when necessary and trying to draw attention to him. Then I learned that he was following my posts about him. His lawyer and his wife Nesibe Baransu got in touch with me. We also met with his brother and I was happy to agree to act as his lawyer. I don't think that's putting my hand under the stone. It was professionally exciting to be involved in such a process.

What did you think when you met Baransu? Was the person you met the same person in your mind?

I had some knowledge about Mehmet Baransu, but I had no prejudices. I have no prejudices about anybody. I think this is partly due to my professio-

nal approach. You learn to discipline yourself in life. Because prejudice is really a stupid thing in my eyes. The person I met was quite intelligent, well-meaning and sometimes emotional. His emotions were mostly due to the legal and social injustices he had suffered, which is natural. I saw and still see that those who associate him with a congregation, an organisation or any other structure - which in my opinion is not a crime - do not know him well enough and some of them create this perception because it suits them. It is a very common cliché to create enemies and to include those whom you do not like or whose existence you consider a threat in this hostile structure. And Mehmet Baransu is always very open and honest. By the way, he is the best client a lawyer could wish for.

Have you felt any pressure from your client?

I can't say that I've felt any particular pressure. But I guess for some people it doesn't make sense to be "Mehmet Baransu's lawyer". There are probably some people who think that I am doing it for money or for some other reason. I have to say that being Baransu's lawyer is one of the most special experiences I have ever had, both from a human and professional point of view, and I am proud to be his lawyer.

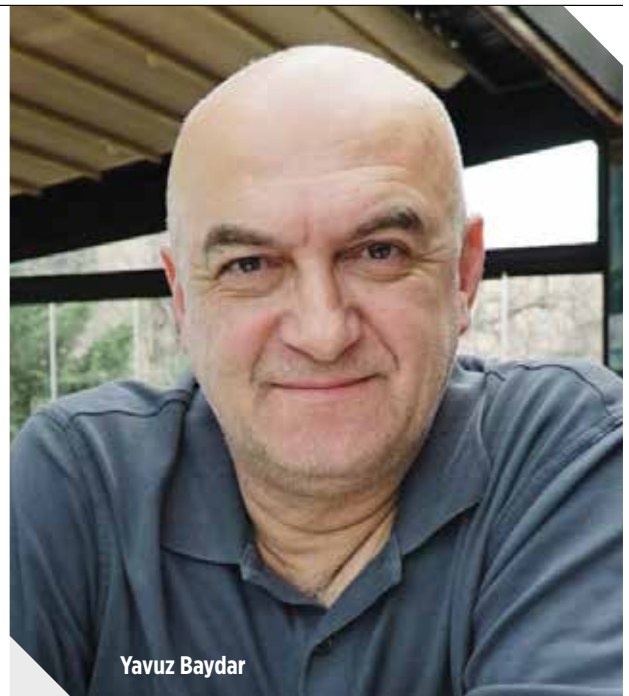
What kind of reactions have you received from your close circle about your involvement in the Baransu case?

Of course there were reactions, but I experience this with almost every client. That's why I didn't pay much attention to it, to be honest. Baransu is an "unwanted" figure in every neighbourhood. Because he is not dependent on anyone. Nevertheless, I think that what he has achieved makes all sections of society angry with him. I think this has something to do with the confusion about what a lawyer is. But as I said, it is not very important to me.

Have you encountered any discrimination in the cases of Mehmet Baransu? If so, can you give an example?

In a society where there is no judiciary and even those who call themselves opponents have no legal ethics, every trial can turn into a story of discrimination. In all the cases where Mehmet Baransu is on trial, it is a name that is on trial, not a crime. Unfortunately, this no longer surprises me. With his reports, Baransu has, so to speak, put a spoke in the wheel of many sections of society, and not a single one of them has been proven to be false.

For this reason, I find the state of those who attack with a "let him rot in jail" attitude just as pathetic as the state of the verdicts, perhaps even more so. People don't read, they don't research, and they're not ashamed to cling to whatever is put in front of them and swing on the tail of a false perception. In this situation, whatever we mean by discrimination, of course it finds us in some form. The real discrimination is that every neighbourhood does not see the wrongs until they are touched, ignores them and even applauds when they are done to others. As Baransu's 8th year in prison comes to an end, the behaviour of journalists, journalist organisations and rights defenders will go down in history as a disgrace. Except for a few names. Under these circumstances, it is meaningless to say that journalism is not a crime when they feel like it. ►



Yavuz Baydar

IT IS ESSENTIAL TO GIVE THE NEWS, NOT TO WITHHOLD IT

A journalist's freedom cannot be restricted even for a single day because he or she has obtained and published classified documents. The state, or whichever political authority it is, has to find the leaker and bring him/her to court, not the journalist. Otherwise, you come to the point of completely abolishing the journalism profession and making it an organic element of the political power.

Journalism is a public service job, it has such a social role and has to rely on a set of ethical rules.

Almost every day, journalists experience friction and conflict with power structures. This is natural, because no ruling party likes a media that 'exposes' its secret affairs, corruption and illegal transactions to the public. But there can be no democracy without an independent and free media. Every democratic government must embrace the media.

Journalism requires a fine balance between freedom and responsibility, especially in matters such as privacy, national security and state secrets. It is essential not to withhold the news, but to report it, but with scrutiny, with sufficient conviction of the accuracy of the content and by seeking the opinion of the 'other side'.

The main criterion is 'public interest'. The journalist is leaked news, or he or she tries and somehow - through legal means - obtains documents and information. Such documents may be signed records, files, phone records, images or digital data, many of which 'touch' on private or intimate space. From that point on, two elements come into play. Is it newsworthy in the public interest? And the most important question: Will the publication of this news lead to loss of life?

In Turkey, this issue has been distorted to the utmost by the Prime Minister and the columnists who support him. Phone records were equated with privacy. But this is not the case.

* Journalist-writer. He has been living in exile in Europe since the coup attempt in Turkey in 2016.

● Received awards twice

- Sedat Simavi Award from the Journalists' Association of Turkey.
- One of the 47 most influential news stories of the last 100 years (Columbia University).



One of the most effective and award-winning news stories written by Mehmet Baransu is the story of four soldiers who lost their lives when a grenade given to them exploded. İbrahim Öztürk, a soldier who fell asleep on guard duty, was given a hand grenade with the pin pulled as punishment by his commander. The soldier held the pin for hours and when he could no longer stand it and let go of the pin, the grenade exploded, killing him and his three colleagues. The truth of the incident, which was reported by the news agencies as an “accidental explosion”, was revealed by Baransu, who obtained the minutes of the testimony.



● Uludere disaster

On 28 December 2011, 35 civilians were killed in an air strike by the Turkish Armed Forces in the Uludere district of Şırnak province. Although many journalists and opposition politicians congratulated Baransu for his report, which used documents to show that the state authorities had been negligent and careless in this tragedy, no one has spoken out about the fact that he has been in prison for years.

MEHMET BARANSU'S NEWS THAT MADE WAVES



BOMB PULLED BY A NEEDLE

1

500 TRILLION LIRAS (\$730 MILLION) OF SMUGGLED MEAT

● Operation Buffalo

The file on meat smuggling prepared by journalist Baransu in 1998 paved the way for Operation Buffalo two years later. The commission set up by the then Minister of the Interior, Sadettin Tantan, found that several companies were smuggling meat. Operation Buffalo led to the seizure of 500 trillion liras (\$730 million) worth of smuggled meat.

THE STATE BOMBED ITS PEOPLE

2

MIT LABELLED CHP MEMBERS

● MIT conspiracy

Baransu writes his articles without caring whether they offend or please anyone, and one of his most important news items was a report on the labelling of members of the Turkish intelligence service. In June 2013, a lawsuit was filed against Baransu demanding up to 12 years in prison for his report on the National Intelligence Organisation's designation of members of the Republican People's Party.





- 25,000 tonnes of cancerous rice fed to soldiers

One of Baransu's important reports is that the military was fed 25,000 tonnes of cancerous rice. In 2015, Baransu was sentenced to 19 years and 6 months in prison for "attempting to overthrow the government and leading a terrorist organisation" for reporting that 25,000 tonnes of cancerous rice had been smuggled into the country with false reports in 2010-11. Baransu, who was subjected to dozens of unlawful acts during the trial, is still in prison.

25 THOUSAND TONS OF CANCER RICE WAS BOUGHT

5

DAĞLICA RAID

- Raid without precautions

The PKK terrorist organisation carried out a raid in Dağlıca on 21 October 2007, killing 13 soldiers and kidnapping eight others. According to the report published by Mehmet Baransu in the Taraf newspaper, although this raid was known in advance, no precautions were taken and it cost the lives of dozens of soldiers.



- UEFA punishes Fenerbahçe

In the 2010-2011 season, the names of some Fenerbahçe and Trabzonspor officials and players were implicated in match-fixing. Mehmet Baransu wrote a series of reports on the subject. The veracity of these reports, which caused a great stir, was confirmed by Fenerbahçe's then vice-president Nihat Özdemir. Nihat Özdemir, who was president of the Football Federation for a time, admitted in 2020 that match-fixing had taken place. UEFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport sanctioned Fenerbahçe for match-fixing.

FOOTBALL MATCH-FIXING OPERATION

7

ARŞİMİDİS MURDER & THE DEMİR-ÖREN FAMILY



- Where do the Demirören's assets come from?

Another important report by Baransu concerns the Demirören family, which today owns the largest media companies. Before 1980, a businessman of Greek origin who owned the Arşimidis Company was burned to death. After the murder, the Demirören family unfairly took over the company. The Demirorens were also involved in the murder. Baransu reports this incident on the basis of a General Staff document dated 1982. This news is very significant because it shows the state of the Turkish media.



- AKP and military decide to end Gülen movement

One of Baransu's most important news items was his 2013 article titled "The decision to end Gülen was taken at the MGK in 2004". At the MGK meeting on 24 June 2004, 15 separate decisions were taken to liquidate the activities of the Gülen movement. The decisions were signed by the AK Party government and the military and presented to the then President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. Baransu, who had been on trial for 52 years for this report, was sentenced to 17 years and 1 month in prison.

MGK'S DECISION TO END GÜLEN

9

BALYOZ COUP PLAN

- Hundreds of thousands to be arrested

Hundreds of thousands to be arrested In 2003, a group within the Turkish armed forces plotted a coup against the AK Party government, which had won elections just a year earlier. In meetings attended by generals, the arrest of hundreds of thousands of people and politicians and the dissolution of parliament were on the agenda. It was Baransu's report in 2010 that brought this coup plan, known as Balyoz to the public's attention.





STATES DON'T LEAK JOURNALISTS DON'T HIDE

Many of the hundreds of cases brought against journalist and writer Mehmet Baransu were based on the fact that he reported information that was considered a state secret. Now, can information that is a state secret be reported? And should it be reported?

GÜLİZAR BAKİ



any of the hundreds of cases brought against journalist and author Mehmet Baransu were based on the fact that he reported information that was considered a state secret. So can information that is a state secret be reported? And should it be reported?

America in the 1960s... At the time, the US was taking democracy to the Far East, to Cuba. For this reason, a secret landing was to be made in Cuba and the New York Times learnt of this secret plan of action. John F. Kennedy, who had taken over from Rixon, used every means of pressure to prevent the news being published. In a meeting with the media on the subject, Kennedy said that every journalist should ask himself before publishing a story, "Is this newsworthy?" and demanded, "All I ask of you is that when you write the story, ask yourself, 'Does this story affect our national security?' In other words, the president is telling journalists to 'self-censor'.

Faced with this demand, the New York Times found a middle ground after intense discussions in the newsroom; the news was published in a single column, not

on the front page. A lot of 'sensitive' national security information was removed.

But Kennedy, who was very angry about these reports at the time, blamed the press for not being critical enough after the failure of the Bay of Pigs operation. He said they could have prevented them from making mistakes by reporting more! Turner Catledge, the NYT's executive editor at the time, says in his memoirs that Kennedy said: "I wish you, the media, had published everything you learned about our Cuba policy. But Kennedy, who was very angry about these reports at the time, blamed the press for not being critical enough after the failure of the Bay of Pigs operation. He said they could have prevented mistakes by reporting more! Turner Catledge, the NYT's executive editor at the time, says in his memoirs that Kennedy said: "I wish you, the media, had published everything you learned about our Cuba policy.

Journalists around the world have published many similar stories that were classified as state secrets. The Watergate scandal and the Pentagon Papers of the 1970s, the Wikileaks documents of the 2000s, the corruption and irregularities in Brazil, Italy and France involving ministers and heads of state, leading many of them to resign and face trial...

But the 'media story of triumph and shame' un-

doubtedly took a different turn with the publication by the NYT and the Washington Post of top secret government documents on an ongoing war. Thanks to these reports, the American occupation of Vietnam came to an end and the media's relationship with the powers that be took a new turn. By publishing the Vietnam documents over the objections of the state, the media put themselves in a different position.

EITHER JAIL OR EXILE FOR BRAVE JOURNALISTS

The recent period in Turkey is full of such courageous news. But courage does not always translate into credibility. At least not in countries like Turkey. Can Dündar, who reported on the National Intelligence Organisation's (MIT) trucks carrying weapons to Syria, was put on trial for revealing 'state secrets'. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was prime minister at the time, said of Dündar, the journalist who broke the story: "He will pay the price! Years have passed since that threatening statement, and Dündar is now in exile in Europe.

Dozens of media outlets have been closed down, hundreds of journalists have been arrested... And today there is no news outside the control of the government's Directorate of Communication. The same media that uncovered the Uludere incident and published the news about the grenade with the pin pulled out, could not publish the news about the downing of the Russian plane by Turkey until after the government's statement. Because the journalists who revealed this news, the Baransus, are in prison, the Dündars are in exile and the media organisations have been closed down. Not only local journalists but also reporters from international organisations are arrested in Turkey.

EVERYONE IS FREE, TO THEIR OWN EXTEND

The reason why investigative journalism is not flourishing in Turkey is the pressure on journalists from the state and capital. There is also a lack of support. Everyone is free in their own way. Journalists who are under pressure from whatever side speak out from that side. The others play three monkeys.

Freedom of the press guarantees freedom in society. And no matter who it touches, it must be protected and defended. To say "the press is free as long as it doesn't touch me" means that tomorrow you will be subject to those restrictions. That is what is happening today. For years, the pressure on the Turkish media has been turned a blind eye, some have been called terrorists, others have been put behind bars and the whole of Turkey has been covered up.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR STATE SECRETS LIES WITH THE STATE

The concept of 'state secrets', which the government uses to protect itself, has become hollow. National security is important, but the responsibility for it lies with the state, not the media.

In law, it is not what the government says that matters, but what the law and conventions say. The principles of the ECtHR in this area shed light on the debate.

Three points dominate the ECtHR's jurisprudence on freedom of the press:

* The press has a very important role in democratic so-

cieties and is obliged to provide information on matters of public interest. The public has a right to be informed.

* Freedom of the press includes a degree of exaggeration and even incitement.

- Restrictions on this freedom in matters of public interest can only be accepted in very exceptional circumstances.

NO INFORMATION IS HIDDEN IN THIS AGE

And let's not forget. In the age of the Internet, information is no longer hidden. The wall of protection around confidential information has been breached. The Wikileaks and Snowden/NSA incidents show this clearly. On the other hand, the fact that established newspapers such as the Guardian and the Washington Post have been showered with journalism awards since last year for publishing such classified documents is instructive about the proper place of the relationship between 'public service' and journalism.

Similarly, the BBC and the Scandinavian public broadcasters, the French news website MediaPart, Glenn Greenwald's Intercept website, etc. are practising intrepid citizen journalism, exposing state wiretapping and surveillance of people.

If they were doing journalism in Turkey, they would all be targeted at least as much as Baransu and dragged through the courts.

Let me conclude by saying this. Of course we have a strong sense of responsibility in this kind of reporting. If a recording or a document does not represent anything of public interest, if its content is limited to private life (as in the case of the Burak Erdoğan recording), it cannot be published. However, when it comes to confidential state documents and records, the editor or journalist has to ask questions to the government-state side and convey its view (confirmation, denial, clarification, etc.). If that side refuses to answer, this must also be mentioned in the news report.

When I spoke to Alan Rusbridger, then editor of the Guardian, I asked him if he had asked the British and US governments and authorities about the Snowden documents. Of course he had. London was outraged by the documents and openly (there's a logical fallacy here) praised the paper, let alone responded to it. In fact, the police raided the paper afterwards and destroyed some laptops. But the US government was very lenient, sending the paper its own views on some of the stories.

This is very difficult for us. Remember how Erdoğan flew into a rage at the news of the İmralı minutes and made the head of Milliyet cry. One thing is for sure: if the government had somehow been informed in advance that the story was going to be published, I am sure that the boss would have blocked its publication.

In Turkey, it's out of the question for a story about a media boss's business, let's say about corruption, to be published in the newspapers and channels owned by that boss, or even in the media organs of other media bosses who are friends of that boss. In this sense, investigative journalism is long gone in Turkey. Those who present themselves to the public as investigative journalists are those who have so far only reported what they were allowed to report and have not been able to enter the field of their employers' business and relations. ■



PHOTO: PATRICK BAZ / AFP

How free is the Arab world?

Journalists are arrested and tortured. The most painful example of this is the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a journalist well known to the world media, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October 2018.



YAVUZ ACAR *

The UNESCO of the United Nations considers the third of May of each year an opportunity to remind governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom and a day of reflection among media professionals on matters of press freedom and professional ethics.

The Arab world welcomed the thirtieth anniversary of World Press Freedom Day in a way that is not very different from previous years, amid the recurring gloomy image in the mirror of journalism that reveals the extent of the difficulties the workers in the field face.

It's needless to say that freedom of the press, and thus the free exercise of journalism, is commensurate with the level countries and their societies reached in democratic awareness, including universal principles of human rights and freedom of expression. Hence, it is not surprising that the record of Arab countries in freedom of the press is poor, in line with the absence or weakness of this democratic culture.

International press reports have listed

Middle Eastern countries among the "most dangerous for journalists" amid tight censorship practiced by governments under various pretexts, most notably compromising national security, insulting the king or president, the ruling family, and employees, and insulting religious values.

The international organization Reporters Without Borders issued its annual report on the World Press Freedom Index, placing the Comoros at the top of the list in the Arab world for 2023 and ranking 75th globally. Mauritania ranked second in the Arab world and 86th in the world, followed by Qatar, ranked 105th in the world and third in the Arab world. Then Lebanon came in 119th place globally and 4th in the Arab world, followed by Tunisia ranked 121, Algeria ranked 136, Somalia ranked 141, Morocco ranked 144 globally.

The UAE ranked 145 in the world and 9 in the Arab world, followed by Jordan 146 in the world, then Sudan 148, Libya 149, Kuwait 154, Oman 155, and Palestine 156. Djibouti ranked 162 in the world and 16 in the Arab world, followed by Egypt 166, Iraq 167, Yemen 168, Saudi Arabia 170, and Bahrain 171. As for Syria, it ranked last in the Arab world and 175 globally.

According to the illustration of press freedom in the world published by the Reporters Without Borders account on Twitter to assess the conditions for practicing media activity in 180 countries, Saudi Arabia ranked penultimate in the Arab world in press freedom and ranked 171 in the world. The illustration also revealed that Tunisia fell from 94th place in the year 2022 to 121st place, in a sharp de-

cline that reached 27 places in just a year under the rule of President Kais Saied, who is accused by the opposition of turning against the constitution and thus against freedom of the press.

Jordan is the second Arab country to witness a sharp decline in the journalism index, falling from 120th last year to 146th in 2023. Reporters Without Borders said journalists face massive censorship despite the political stability in Jordan. Saudi Arabia also fell to the 170th rank in 2023, after it was 166th in the world in the 2022 ranking.

Although many Arab countries witnessed a decline in the press freedom ranking for 2023, the index of some countries improved slightly, such as Kuwait, Palestine, the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, and Iraq.

Although many Arab countries witnessed a decline in the press freedom ranking for 2023, the index of some countries improved slightly, such as Kuwait, Palestine, the Sultanate of Oman, Yemen, and Iraq.

As shown by the World Press Freedom Index, no country in the Middle East and North Africa region achieves even a “satisfactory” score. There is no doubt that the falling of Arab countries that are witnessing fierce wars or general unrest, such as Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, and the like, to the bottom of the list is understandable and justified to a certain degree. However, the reason for the low scores of the countries in which some political and economic stability prevails, such as the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, in addition to Jordan, is political issues.

Yes, Saudi Arabia launched a group of private satellite stations at the beginning of the new century for the first time. After the launch of Vision 2030 in 2016, a series of changes began in the television field, including the launch of the SBC channel, which specializes in entertainment programs and series with more extroverted tendencies. The cinema returned to it in December 2017 after the approval of the Board of Directors of the General Authority for Audiovisual Media to issue licenses for those wishing to open cinemas. Four months later, the first cinema in Saudi Arabia was opened, in the presence of the Saudi Minister of Information. The authorities also plan to open 350 cinemas by 2030.

There is a state of general satisfaction and pride in the level that the Saudi press has reached in general after the reform steps in the field of rights and freedoms, especially regarding the status of women in society, under the guidance of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. However, these positive developments, which are “satisfactory for the average Saudi citizen,” lag behind international standards for human rights and freedoms, including freedom of the press.

The Reporters Without Borders report confirmed the absence of free media in Saudi Arabia, and that journalists are subject to strict surveillance, even if they are abroad, noting that the number of journalists and bloggers behind bars has more than tripled since 2017 when Salman came to power. The report stated that almost all Saudi media outlets are under the control of the authorities, bearing in mind that self-censorship is the prevailing rule even on so-

cial media platforms, and they are also forced to follow the government line drawn by the official news agency (SPA).

The report also stated that self-censorship casts a shadow over the media affiliated with the royal family, while other platforms are subject to daily monitoring by the Ministry of Information, as anyone who criticizes the Kingdom's role in the war on Yemen or opposes the normalization of relations with Israel is accused of treason, while journalists who choose to neutrality is subject to all kinds of accusations if they do not follow the same line as the official media in praising officials.

It is noteworthy that the Saudi Penal Code, as well as the laws against terrorism and cybercrimes, require the imprisonment of journalists or their suspension from work whenever they criticize or express their opinion on political affairs, as they are accused of blasphemy, insulting religion, inciting sedition, threatening national unity, or harming the image of the king and the state, according to the report of Reporters Without Borders.

This matter is not limited to the media operating inside Saudi Arabia, which is the general picture for all Arab countries as well, but rather includes those operating outside the Kingdom, most of which are in Britain, where they range between self-censorship and the red lines drawn by the official news agency. Media professionals who attempt to carry out their work in a neutral or oppositional manner are subject to arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture, and sometimes the matter reaches even to the point of being killed. The killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, is the most prominent and closest example of this.

Although the official laws in all Arab countries guarantee the freedom of the press and journalists, these laws often remain just ink on paper in the light of the absence of democratic maturity, and the dominance of the desert culture and the tribal system in all its modern forms over the systems of government and society instead of the culture of the modern social contract.

No one disagrees with the importance of freedom of the press as a safety valve and a barrier to control the transgressions of governments and officials, which requires providing a safe environment for journalists to practice their duties without the risk of harassment, prosecution, arrest, imprisonment, or even murder.

On this occasion, we call on all countries of the world to provide the necessary climate for journalists to freely practice their profession and to inform people of the facts without any hindrance. ■

** Yavuz Acar, a Turkish writer and political analyst. He graduated from the International Islamic Sciences University in Jordan. He worked in Arabic section of Cihan News Agency and Zaman newspaper. Analyst and writer Yavuz Acar reported and wrote analytical articles documenting the period of Turkish police raid the offices of Zaman. He wrote a book titled “The Story of Turkey between Erdogan the First and the Second”. He analyses in this book the facts and events Turkey witnessed from 2002 to 2020.*



DR. MIA SWART *

Press freedom in South Africa: Reasons for peace of mind

The right of journalists to expose corruption, one of South Africa's greatest social maladies, has not always been respected, and South Africa cannot be described as a haven for journalists.

From an official and comparative perspective, press freedom in South Africa appears to be in good shape. According to the World Press Freedom Index, South Africa has moved up 10 places to 25th in 2022. This puts it one place above the United Kingdom.

Despite the slow collapse of many of the pillars of South Africa's democracy, the media, or 'fourth estate', is still very much intact in South Africa.

The starting point for the protection of press freedom is the South African Constitution of 1996. The following article of the Constitution protects freedom of expression and states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and media, freedom to receive and impart information, ideas, artistic creativity, and academic and scientific research.

However, despite the strong protection in section 16 of the Constitution, the right to freedom of the press is not absolute. It is sub-

ject to an internal limitation contained in another article of the Constitution, which states that war propaganda, incitement to violence and advocacy of hatred are not protected.

In its ruling on the constitutional right to reparations, known as the Fose case, the Constitutional Court stated that freedom of expression is essential to the right of every individual to realise his or her free potential as a human being.

In South Africa, a court ruled in 1995 that "the press is at the forefront of the struggle to protect democracy. It is the duty of the press to expose corruption, fraud and bribery whenever they occur... The press must act as a watchdog over government."

JOURNALISTS UNDER THREAT

However, the right of journalists to expose corruption, one of South Africa's greatest social ills, has not always been respected, and South Africa cannot be described as a haven for journalists. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), South African journalists

who expose corruption in South Africa are 'threatened by the politicians concerned, their associates and supporters'. While journalists are rarely arrested in South Africa, law enforcement agencies sometimes fail to protect them when they are subjected to violence. Police violence against journalists is also on the rise in the country. This intolerant atmosphere may explain why investigative journalism has not played a greater role in the fight against corruption in South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA'S NEIGHBOURS

The very high level of press freedom enjoyed by South Africans is not shared by any of South Africa's neighbours. With the exception of Namibia, freedom of expression is severely threatened or non-existent in southern Africa. The harassment, persecution and silencing of journalists in the region has never been worse.

In the context of Zimbabwe, Amnesty International highlighted the police intimidation and harassment of freelance journalist and anti-corruption activist Hopewell Chin'ono, who was detained three times between July 2020 and January 2021. Chin'ono was detained for more than 80 days for exposing government corruption and supporting the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

In Mozambique, Amnesty highlighted the threat to media freedom posed by a Molotov cocktail attack on a media outlet by an unknown group on 23 August 2020. The group entered the offices of the independent weekly Canal de Moçambique, doused it with petrol and set it on fire with Molotov cocktails, causing extensive damage to equipment, furniture and files.

One might ask whether South Africa has a responsibility to help protect the safety of journalists in countries such as Lesotho and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). Prominent Swazi journalist and human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko was murdered in his home on 21 January. This was part of a wider effort in Swaziland to silence pro-democracy and human rights activists in Eswatini. Zimbabwean journalist Hopewell Chin'ono tweeted that the assassination was "a chilling reminder that corrupt political elites will go to any length to silence pro-democracy voices". There was little doubt that the assassination was carried out on the king's

orders. It is clear that those who speak out for political reform in Swaziland are not safe.

Speaking about press freedom in South Africa, Deprose Muchena of Amnesty International said: "An independent and free press is the cornerstone of any society. It ensures the free flow of information and ideas that build countries.

SOUTH AFRICA

Speaking on Media Freedom Day last October, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said that the fact that no journalist had been killed in 2022 was a sign of the strength of journalism and democracy in the country. He mentioned that female journalists were being attacked on social media platforms using misogynistic terminology.

She also mentioned the threat to media freedom posed by disinformation. As an example, she recalled the July 2021 riots in different parts of the country, where misinformation disguised as news inflamed tensions among the population and even fuelled violence and riots.

News24 journalist Karyn Maughan is facing her first criminal charges for reporting on the health of former president Jacob Zuma. Zuma's lawyers allege that Downer leaked a confidential medical letter about the president's health to Maughan, who used it in her reporting.

The Committee to Protect Journalists has called on former president Jacob Zuma to drop the private criminal case against Karyn Maughan and allow the press to cover the court proceedings without fear of intimidation or reprisal. Zuma has so far ignored this warning.

Media freedom in South Africa must be judged in the context of the country's staggering crime and corruption rates. One might ask whether a crackdown on investigative journalism would put members of the press at greater risk. Or does the fact that journalists are not persecuted mean that most South African journalists are not brave? From this perspective, South Africa's high ranking on the media freedom index does not mean as much as it should. ■

** Dr Mia Swart is a visiting professor at the University of the Witwatersrand. She previously worked at Al Jazeera's Centre for Public Freedoms and Human Rights. She is a regular contributor to the South African media.*



CATHERINE GICHERU *

Strong Women Journalists for a Strong Africa

In Africa, women journalists stand as pillars of resilience, uncovering stories, amplifying voices and shining a light on issues that have been ignored or pushed into the shadows.

The media play an important role in shaping society's perceptions, attitudes and norms. The media in Africa is as diverse as it is vibrant, reflecting a rich tapestry of cultures, languages and stories. But despite significant economic progress and democratisation in many countries across the continent over the past two decades, women have not benefited equally. Nevertheless, women journalists stand as resilient pillars, uncovering stories, amplifying voices and shining a light on issues that have been ignored or pushed into the shadows.

While the number of women in leadership positions in national parliaments has increased, women's representation in the media has decreased. Women's presence in the news has been devalued and they continue to be under-represented in newsroom leadership; stories about the issues that affect them are not told; and the vast majority of experts and sources quoted continue to be men. The continued silencing of women's voices is not unique to Africa, it is a global problem. Women's views are drowned out by up to six men, news decisions are overwhelmingly made by men, reported by men and consumed by men. Women continue to be excluded from

the news in an environment that continues to marginalise and downplay their achievements and contributions.

NUMBER OF FEMALE REPORTERS HAS DECLINED

In Africa, the number of women reporters decreased from 35% in 2015 to 32% in 2020. The lack of women in leadership roles, negative stereotypes and beliefs about women's ability to lead are some of the barriers to equality in the newsroom that set women up for failure.

Even when the media do report success stories, they often portray women without a nuanced understanding of gender. This underrepresentation and bias towards men's perspectives in the news was evident in the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting their influence on policy decisions. Unfortunately, the socio-economic consequences of these policies are not among the issues covered by the media, either then or now.

TECHNOLOGY REINFORCES GENDER INEQUALITY

Women journalists make invaluable contributions while facing many challenges that

require attention. They often work with outdated equipment and need easy access to training and professional development opportunities due to financial constraints or systemic biases that favour promotion, skills training and even male journalists. As more news organisations move their operations online, women journalists are forced to confront the digital divide that limits their access to the internet and silences their voices by preventing them from taking full advantage of the opportunities these spaces offer. The growing role of technology in newsrooms exacerbates gender inequality in the news media, as women are less likely to have the necessary technical skills.

ONLINE VIOLENCE

Female journalists also face many challenges, such as 'sexual harassment' and 'pay discrimination'. The threat of harassment is not limited to the newsroom. Women journalists face online harassment both inside and outside the workplace, with social media escalating threats with the aim of intimidating and silencing them. Women journalists are targeted not only because of what they report, but also because they dare to speak out and take their rightful place in the public sphere. In an increasingly toxic information ecosystem, tech platforms are key enablers of online violence. Platforms and news organisations often fail to provide women journalists with the support they need to deal with online harassment and attacks. Journalists often have to find this support through their professional networks, family, friends and human and gender rights advocates in their countries.

There is also an economic dimension to these threats. The UN estimates that, if nothing is done, women's limited access to the online world will cost low- and middle-income countries \$1.5 trillion in lost gross domestic product by 2025. Women's exclusion from the digital world has cost low- and middle-income countries \$1 trillion in GDP over the past decade. Reversing this trend will require addressing the issue of online violence.

BUT THERE ARE GOOD EXAMPLES

In recent years, the need for a more balanced and em-

powering representation of women in African media has been increasingly recognised, with initiatives and campaigns promoting gender equality and challenging stereotypes. For example, the Wole Soyinka Center for Investigative Journalism's Women Reporters Leadership Program, the Africa Women Journalism Project and WAN-IFRA's Women in News Program provide women journalists with skills training, fellowships, micro-grants and mentorship to address under-researched issues affecting women that are often overlooked by newsrooms, and to influence conversations about the leadership status of women in newsrooms. Other organisations include national and regional associations of women journalists, such as the Association of Women Journalists in Nigeria, the Media Women's Association in Kenya and the Tanzania Media Women's Association, as well as associations of women working in different media sectors, such as radio. Individual journalists are breaking new ground by challenging perceptions of women and leadership in the media as an anomaly.

In Africa, as in many parts of the world, print newspapers are in rapid decline as they lose market share to digital channels. Gender equality is not just a necessity for media that want to be inclusive. It is not only a journalist's duty to give a voice to everyone in society. It is also a business imperative. In this report, researchers found that the global online and print newspaper industry could increase revenues by \$11 billion by 2027 and \$38 billion by 2032 if it reduced the gender gap in news consumption (currently 11-12 percent) by one percentage point each year for the next decade.

African women journalists play a vital role in shaping narratives, advocating for social change and amplifying marginalised voices. Through their reporting, they challenge stereotypes, push for gender equality and draw attention to critical issues affecting the lives of women across the continent. Media organisations and industry leaders must work together to create an environment where African media can thrive, enriched by their unique perspectives. ■

** Catherine Gicheru. ICFJ Knight Fellow and founder/director of the African Women Journalism Project.*

“AFRICAN JOURNALISTS ARE ISOLATED IN EXILE”

Eritrea, which has been at the bottom of Reporters Without Borders’ annual press freedom index for more than seven years running, has earned the nickname ‘Africa’s North Korea’.



FATHI OSMAN *

Why is the exile of African journalists so special? As one of hundreds of African journalists in exile, I have often been asked this question in private and on panels. We cannot separate cause from effect. The dismal state of press freedom in many African countries provides the necessary background to answer this crucial question.

My own country, Eritrea, for example, provides the most visible and extreme examples of these conditions on the continent. Ranked at the bottom of Reporters Without Borders’ annual press freedom index for more than sev-

en consecutive years, Eritrea has earned the nickname ‘Africa’s North Korea’. The description reflects the government’s attitude towards a free press.

On the morning of 18 September 2001, just a week after the 11 September attacks, security forces arrested editors and reporters from the fledgling private media. Despite calls from international organisations for their immediate release, 22 years later their whereabouts remain unknown. Sadly, some have died in solitary confinement.

Eritrea, with a population of 3.5 million, has only one newspaper, one radio station and one television station, all

owned by the government. The International Telecommunication Union said in 2019 that only 1.3 per cent of Eritrea's population had access to the internet. Eritreans need police authorisation to buy new SIM cards from the state-owned Eritrean Telecommunications Services Company (Eritel), the only internet provider. Repressive conditions for press freedom have forced many Eritrean journalists to leave the country.

Notably, the experience of exile is experienced differently within and outside the continent. Many African states tightening their grip on power have secret security coordination agreements. When journalists flee their country, a nightmarish experience of exile begins. It takes less than a hundred-dollar bill or a bottle of whisky to send a journalist back from his first country of exile. An Eritrean colleague of mine in Khartoum was repeatedly intimidated by security officials and regularly had to bribe them to complete the paperwork to travel to a third country. He was one of the lucky ones who was not sent back.

When Eritrean and Ethiopian troops entered northern Tigray in November 2020, agents of the Eritrean security forces raided UN refugee camps and abducted 80 young people, including several journalists, who were taken back to Eritrea. Again, the whereabouts of those abducted are unknown. The Eritrean model is at the extreme end of the spectrum, but other countries have terrible records of abuses that force journalists into exile.

To document the exile experience of African journalists, Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation has published a book with contributions from 16 exiled journalists from different countries. *Hunted: African Journalists in Exile*. The book reflects how these journalists have suffered both inside and outside the continent.

The suffering outside Africa is different, but equally agonising. In many European countries, journalists in exile are not treated as journalists fleeing persecution, but as ordinary refugees who are not entitled to special protection because of the very reason they seek legal protection: their profession. Furthermore, journalists from Russia, Ukraine, Syria and other conflict zones are given priority, while African journalists' requests for protection are relegated to the background.

The psychological impact of this experience goes much deeper. African journalists in exile do not feel safe until they are thousands of kilometres away from the security services of their home countries. Once they reach distant safe havens, the cultural challenges of learning new languages and making greater efforts to connect with the sources of their stories complicate their lives in exile. Securing the



The battle for press freedom in Africa must be fought, however difficult and fruitless it may seem. The progress made by journalists in Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria is inspiring and exemplary.

financial and other forms of support needed to start a new project in exile is another dimension of suffering. In this context, most donors prioritise journalists from war zones. Once again, African journalists feel marginalised and sidelined.

As a result of these complex problems, many journalists are forced to leave the profession and choose to work in other fields.

The solution to the dilemma of journalists in exile depends first and foremost on improving press freedom on the continent. This task may seem difficult and fruitless, but the progress made by journalists in Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria is inspiring and a model for other countries.

Protection is essential for African journalists in exile. To address protection and professional issues, African journalists in exile must unite to build a global union for them. This union should not only represent them, but also work hard to realise their aspirations and address the multifaceted problems of exile. It should also be a springboard to work for press freedom and to improve the situation of their colleagues working under difficult conditions in their countries. ■

** Fathi Osman is an Eritrean journalist and former diplomat who has been living in exile in France since 2012.*

PRESS FREEDOM IN GERMANY:

WHINING FROM UP HERE



THORA MEISSNER *

In 2022, Germany dropped from 16th to 21st place in the press freedom ranking. Last year there were 103 attacks on journalists. Many incidents go unreported or uninvestigated, so the number could be higher.

Twe stop looking down our noses and look around us, we see that journalists all over the world are confronted with the reality that freedom of the press is slipping away. In Germany, too, this reality is taking on serious proportions. According to the latest data from Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the freedom of the press that journalists used to enjoy has fallen from 16th to 21st place.

Given that there are 180 countries on the list, this may seem like a snooty complaint. But a closer look reveals a situation that should not be ignored. In particular, Germany's position has worsened when it comes to the "safety of media workers".

SPAT ON, KICKED AND STRANGLER

RSF recorded a total of 103 attacks on journalists in 2022. According to Close-Up Germany, this is the highest number since counting began (2015, 39 attacks), but in reality the number could be even higher as many incidents go unreported or uninvestigated.

This year, there have been 56 cases of journalists or cameramen being punched, and 10 cases of them being kicked. According to RSF, there were six cases of bottles and hard objects being thrown at journalists. There were also five cases of masks being pulled off, four cases of journalists being spat on and one case of hair being pulled during the Corona period. Note that RSF did not record incidents of shoving, harassment and intimidation. Insults, threats and acts of violence



in the digital environment were also not included. Moreover, the scale of violence against media workers may be even higher in reality, as the number of unreported cases is estimated to be high.

IDEOLOGICAL, ANTI-SEMITIC AND RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST CONTEXT

According to the 2023 Press Freedom Ranking document “Nachaufnahme Deutschland”, “In 36 of these attacks, right-wing extremists could be identified as perpetrators because their names were known and they were members of right-wing organisations such as AfD, Die Basis, Dritter Weg, Freie Sachsen and NPD”. In total, 87 of the 103 incidents took place in an ideological, anti-Semitic and right-wing extremist context.

On 20 August, Ostthüringer, the mayor of Bad Lobenstein in Thuringia, attacked newspaper reporter Peter Hagen. Following the incident, the reporter filed a complaint for assault and battery and damage to property. Following an investigation, the mayor was suspended from office.

The harsh treatment of journalists during the Corona demonstrations and protests is seen as an intersection of increasing violence against media workers. Even with the lifting of the Corona measures after the pandemic, the violence has not stopped. In particular, the fact that most of the violence comes from right-wing organisations casts a huge shadow over press freedom in Germany. These right-wing organisations do not hesitate to obstruct the press and use violence.

JOURNALISTS REMAIN SILENT

Most of the 103 confirmed attacks took place in Saxony (24), followed by Berlin (17), Thuringia (13), Bavaria (10), Baden-Württemberg (9), Saxony-Anhalt (7), Rhineland-Palatinate (5), Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (4), Lower Saxony (4), Hesse (3), North Rhine-Westphalia (3), Schleswig-Holstein (2), Hamburg (1) and Saarland (1). (Source: RSF)

According to RSF, almost half of the attacks took place in states with a particularly high number of right-wing extremist incidents. As is well known, the demonstrations were initially mainly against the government’s Corona measures. “It became a problem in the Corona demonstrations that took place in 2021 and 2022, but now the problems have become bigger,” said Christopher Resch of Reporters Without Borders: “The demonstrations have diminished, but we are seeing an increase in violence against media workers. We are also seeing violence from the police.

Journalists told RSF that police officers at the scene did not intervene or investigate. Out of a total of 103 cases of violence, about half were reported or formally investigated. Victims are afraid to press charges. They were afraid that violent neo-Nazis and their circles would reach their addresses and tried to protect themselves from attacks. Because their addresses are usually included in the investigation files (after a complaint has been filed) and these files can be seen by the accused and their lawyers.

Psychological violence against queer media workers. In addition to the 103 recorded attacks on journalists, at least 16 attempted attacks were thwarted. Some of these attacks were also prevented by the police. However, most journalists were provided with a bodyguard, which prevented the attempted attacks.

Journalists, especially those who investigate and write about the far right, have had to work under guard for years. RBB reporter Olaf Sundermeyer and his team were harassed, insulted and threatened during a demonstration on 1 August.

Queer media workers, however, are subjected to enormous psychological violence and pressure. They are regularly insulted, raped and even threatened with death. These threats are made on the street, in letters, emails and even phone calls. The level of threats, especially on social media, has reached extreme levels. In general, however, the attacks do not come from state institutions, but from individuals and associations who try to intimidate members of the media by calling them the “lying press” or using other inflammatory rhetoric. ■

** Thora Meißner. Local editor from Arnsberg, NRW*

Dark times necessitate a greater need for journalism

I believe and I urge you all that a profession like ours deserves every solidarity. Don't abandon us, because we will continue to report the news. Don't abandon us, because the most powerful are coming after us. Silence is not an option, no matter what the outcome. It is not our choice. And it will never be.



ÓSCAR MARTINEZ *

I am a fellow member of El Faro, a newspaper dedicated to covering the last 25 years of persecution in Central America, a troubled part of the world.

In **Nicaragua**, more than 150 journalists have been forced to flee their country due to harassment, imprisonment and torture by dictator Daniel Ortega. Forgetting everything he fought for with the 'Sandinistas', a democratic socialist political party in Nicaragua, Ortega has become a tyrant even worse than the dictator he removed from power when he was a revolutionary.

Some of these journalists were already living in exile outside the country when they learned that the dictator had exiled them, annulled their citizenship and confiscated all their assets in their country. Some journalists fled the country before dawn, holding their young children by the hands, to avoid falling into the regime's clutches. Others set off on

boats. When they looked back, tears rolled down their cheeks.

Some of my colleagues had to spend their first times in exile on a park bench. This is how they lived their lives until they had the support of other fellow exiles. Despite the persecution, flight, exile, insecurity and fear, most journalists continue to investigate from afar the stories that expose the dictator's collusion and corruption. I wonder what great loyalty drives these people who still follow their beliefs and practice journalism even in the most troubled moments of their lives.

JUSTICE HELD HOSTAGE, JOURNALISTS TRY TO SAVE IT

Guatemala's justice system has been taken hostage by groups that want to eliminate the possibility of holding to account those who committed massacres during the Civil War, or those who looted the state treasury as

heads of state or businessmen. One of the country's most emblematic journalists, Jose Rubén Zamora, was recently sentenced to six years in prison for 'money laundering' after a trial filled with irregularities. Zamora had to change defense lawyers ten times because they were either threatened or accused of being Zamora's lawyer. Zamora continues to spend his days locked in a cell with no ventilation and almost no light, and is only allowed to ventilate for one hour a day.

Justice in Guatemala is held captive by the powerful. Investigations have been ordered against nine journalists and columnists in the country. Today, more than 22 Guatemalan journalists are in exile. But many more have stayed, even though they know they are on the enemies list of those in power. They continue to work, investigate and expose the truth, not only in the capital, but also in rural indigenous communities far from the spotlight and cameras of the international media.

WHY DOES A JOURNALIST REPORT NEWS AT THE COST OF HIS LIFE AND FREEDOM?

We wonder what drives them to keep working, because it has shown them that if they do their job, they can stay in the shadows for years. In **Honduras**, there are threats of digital harassment from those in power. In a country where, according to the Inter-American Press Association, 3 more journalists were murdered in 2022 alone, there seems to be no sanction for surveillance and interference. One of these murders was carried out on the streets of the capital by people dressed as police officers. Yet dozens of journalists in the country continue to investigate the links between organized crime and the state, organized crime and the private sector. What drives them to get up every morning, say goodbye to their children and investigate in a country where doing so could cost them their lives?

DICTATORSHIP DISGUISED AS DEMOCRACY

El Salvador is on its way to becoming a full-fledged dictatorship. It is no longer a democracy. Some think tanks describe it as a hybrid regime that presents a democratic appearance but is authoritarian at its core. One journalist in particular was monitored for 17 months using Pegasus spyware, with no serious investigation. Alone on my news platform El Faro, 22 people were targeted, including me, when we came together to prove the president's collusion with criminal gangs. Gang laws have been passed that can imprison a journalist for up to 30 years if he or she discloses information about gangs or their dealings with those in power, if a judge finds that such information raises public concern. But who defines what causes public concern? The judges of the regime.

Just a few weeks ago a police chief said they would go after journalists and soon people will see us being tried and jailed. For more than a year we have been living under a 'state of emergency' that allows any police officer or soldier to arrest and imprison anyone he or she deems suspicious. Dozens of them have died in the regime's prisons, with torture marks on their bodies. Numerous journalistic publications and reports by national and international organizations have shown that torture has become state policy. La Palabra confirms that the things that have plagued us throughout our 12-year civil war have been voiced aloud: exile, repression, political persecution, torture.

DECEIVED SOCIETY AND JOURNALISM IN THE MIDDLE

This structure is controlled by one man, Popular President Nayib Bukele. A society deprived of peace processes once again believes that violence is the solution and journalism is left in the middle. The press is persecuted by those in power and despised by much of the society it informs. Yet Salvadoran journalism has never uncovered as many cases of corruption, impunity and state violence as it has in this century. Why do all these journalists continue to investigate the great figure of El Salvador, knowing that any of them could be sentenced to death for many years? There will be nuances in each answer and different personal motivations in each way of thinking, but I am sure that in general, the answer of the Central American Union, of which I am proud to be a member, will be "courage".

DO NOT ABANDON US SO THAT WE CAN SUCCEED

Dark times necessitate a greater need for journalism. We believe this and we don't care if we are wrong. Our colleagues have shown that they understand their historic role. When these journalists spent time in a bar in El Salvador, Guatemala City or Tegucigalpa, they didn't just talk about commitment and sacrifice; when tyrants returned, they practiced their faith, even if it meant exile or imprisonment. I believe, and I urge you all, that a profession like ours deserves every solidarity. Do not abandon us, because we will continue to report the news. Do not abandon us, because the powerful ones are coming after us. We proudly continue our brave and honest work in the region.

Silence is not an option, no matter what the outcome. It is not our choice. And it never will be. ■

** Óscar Martínez. Born in El Salvador, Óscar Martínez is the editor-in-chief of ElFaro, South America's first online magazine. He is one of Central America's best-known investigative journalists. Martínez has received many awards and has published several books.*

PALESTINIAN JOURNALISTS IN THE FIRING LINE

In the first six months of 2023, a total of 194 Israeli violations against journalists were documented. It is almost impossible for a journalist from the West Bank to travel to or return from Gaza. Very few journalists from the West Bank can enter Jerusalem. To enter Jerusalem, men must be over 55 and women over 50, or have special permits from the Israeli authorities.



WALID BATRAWI *

It has been more than a year since Al-Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh was killed by a stray bullet from an Israeli soldier in the Jenin refugee camp in the northern West Bank.

Shireen was not only a colleague but also a friend. When we worked for Al-Jazeera English, we shared an office and our Friday morning breakfasts, which she prepared to perfection.

Shireen was a very humble and sensitive person, though she looked strong on screen, and her tragic assassination shocked us and the world.

Palestinian, international and Israeli human rights organisations, as well as prominent international media outlets such as CNN and the BBC, have produced independent investigations holding Israel responsible for Shireen Abu Akleh's murder. Yet the Israeli soldier found responsible for her shooting still enjoys immunity and continues to walk free!

It is true that Palestine ranks low on the list of journalists killed, with 21 professional or citizen journalists killed by

Israeli forces, according to UNESCO. In addition, journalists continue to be harassed on a daily basis.

The Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) documented a total of 194 Israeli violations against journalists in the first six months of 2023. In July, for example, MADA reported 45 violations to the authorities, including physical assaults such as beatings and punching, as well as the injury of three journalists by rubber bullets and the suffocation of three journalists by tear gas canisters.

Israeli harassment is not confined to Palestinian journalists. The Foreign Press Association (FPA) in Israel issued a statement on 10 July expressing concern over an incident in which an Israeli soldier in a military vehicle opened fire on the camera and live broadcast equipment of FPA member Al-Araby TV during the Israeli forces' operation in Jenin on 4 July.

Reports of violence against Palestinian journalists come not only from Israeli soldiers, but also from local resi-



A screenshot obtained by Al-Jazeera Arabic shows reporter Shireen Abu Akleh lying on the ground after being fatally shot in the West Bank city of Jenin on 11 May 2022. (Al-Jazeera/YouTube)

dents, who are subjected to all kinds of harassment in full view of the army. According to the International Federation of Journalists, “On 20 June, freelance photojournalist Khalid Taha was attacked by Israeli settlers while travelling in his car between the towns of Hawarah and Nablus in the northern occupied West Bank. On the same day, a journalist working for the Al Ghad TV channel was beaten by Israelis at the entrance to the city of Nablus.

According to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, on 2 August, in the northern part of the occupied West Bank, a man driving an ambulance bearing the emblem of Israel’s national ambulance service, the Red Star of David, pointed his gun at Palestinian journalists Nasser and Ali Ashtiyah and local activist Ayman Ghrrayeb and threatened to shoot them. Israel’s violations go beyond targeting Palestinian journalists to include foreign media workers.

In a statement issued on 21 May, the FPA expressed its concern over the physical and verbal attacks on journalists during the flag march at Damascus Gate in Jerusalem on Thursday 18 May.

NOT ONLY SOLDIERS, BUT ALSO CIVILIANS

Protesters repeatedly attacked journalists with water bottles, cans and wooden sticks. Demonstrators also shouted violent and racist slurs at journalists in front of police officers. At least two journalists were slightly injured as a result of these attacks. In addition, a CNN crew covering events in the Old City (of Jerusalem) was beaten with unnecessary force by a police team while trying to interview local Palestinians.

In addition, Israeli soldiers at checkpoints do not recognise International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) press cards and only accept Israeli government press cards, which are rarely issued to Palestinian journalists.

Palestinian journalists are also restricted in their movements by the authorities. It is almost impossible for a journalist from the West Bank to travel to or from Gaza. Very few journalists from the West Bank can enter Jerusalem. To enter Jerusalem, men must be over 55 and women over 50, or have special permits from the Israeli authorities.

The Israeli authorities did not allow any foreign jour-

nalists to enter the Gaza Strip in May 2023, despite requests from various international media organisations during the five days of tension in Gaza.

Two years ago, in May 2021, the Israeli Air Force destroyed office buildings used by 23 Palestinian and international media outlets, including the US news agency Associated Press and the Qatari television channel Al Jazeera, RSF reported.

Following the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the International Centre for Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) and the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) filed a new complaint with the International Criminal Court on 20 September 2022 regarding the shooting of Abu Akleh and Ali Samoudi, a Palestinian journalist who was with her on the day of the incident.

In April 2022, an application was submitted to the ICC requesting the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) to open an investigation “into the systematic targeting by the Israeli occupation forces of the premises of Palestinian journalists and media organisations, including Ahmed Abu Hussein, Yasser Murtaja, Muath Amarneh and Nedal Eshtayah”. The petition emphasised that “all of the journalists included in both complaints were wearing clearly visible PRESS vests at the time they were targeted”. It also detailed the targeting of media offices in Gaza City in May 2021.

International law protects journalists in areas of armed conflict. The deliberate targeting of journalists is therefore considered a war crime. According to the International Press Institute, “States must promptly, thoroughly and independently investigate attacks against journalists and prosecute those responsible. This obligation also applies in conflict zones, where the authorities have a legal obligation under international humanitarian law to ensure the safety of journalists and media workers”. But Israel has never been able to do so. ■

** Walid Batrawi is a Palestinian journalist based in Ramallah and winner of the 2003 Natali Prize for “Excellence in Human Rights, Democracy and Development Reporting” in the Arab World, Iran and Israel category.*

Zahra Joya



WE ARE NOT SAFE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD

Afghan journalist Zahra Joya says the new generation of journalism in Afghanistan is now very difficult and for women it has become impossible. The exiled journalist fears for her safety. So for an Afghan journalist, nowhere in the world is safe.

YÜKSEL DURGUT

Zahra Joya was one of the 12 women selected by Time magazine as Woman of the Year for 2022. She was also honored by the BBC as one of the 100 most influential women. In addition to being a journalist and activist, her life changed after her interview with the famous actress Angelina Jolie.

In 2015, she named Rukhshana Media after a 19-year-old woman who was stoned to death by the Taliban. She was awarded the British Journalism Award. In order to tell the unknown stories of women and girls in Afghanistan to the world and to support women journalists, Rukhshana has carried out the 'Women Report Afghanistan' project in partnership with the world-renowned British newspaper The Guardian.

In the interview with Angelina Jolie, she narrated that she was 5 years old when the Taliban first came to power in Afghanistan and banned girls' education, and that she had to walk for two

hours every day to go to school dressed as a boy.

We talked to Zahra Joya, a journalist in exile in the UK, about Afghanistan and her life in exile in the UK.

The situation of journalists in Afghanistan is getting worse after the Taliban. What about women, what about women journalists?

After the Taliban took control in Afghanistan, journalists and free media were unfortunately under attack, because hundreds of free media outlets were shut down. Subsequently, many experienced journalists left the country because of the high risks.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), more than 80 percent of women journalists have lost their jobs. Women journalists are not allowed to work with a fellow journalist in Afghanistan. But a group of women journalists are still working, but they face a lot of restrictions. So, you know, they are forced to wear headscarves. Even television anchors have to wear a veil when they read the news.

And women cannot give interviews without

wearing a headscarf and veil. Free media and independent journalists were a great achievement of the West in Afghanistan in the last 20 years. Unfortunately, we have lost this great gain.

What was life like for women journalists before the Taliban, during this free and independent period?

It was quite good, but then Afghanistan was a dangerous country for journalists, as it has always been. But it was still better than under the Taliban because we had laws. We had a unique law, a unique role for the media. And the previous government had a very good and protective organization for media freedom. We had a Ministry of Culture and Information in Kabul. This ministry was a special supporter for journalists. Now there is no independent organization to help journalists.

There are still suffering journalists in Afghanistan. Women journalists can write news and articles by changing their names. Other journalists are afraid to write against the Taliban. What can and should journalists do to restore freedom of expression and press freedom in Afghanistan?

After the Taliban seized power, even ordinary people inside the country have lost their freedom of expression. For example, they are not even allowed to post or write anything against the Taliban on social media. If someone posts, if they find out that he or she is in Afghanistan, they will definitely go and find him or her.

Unfortunately, I don't remember the exact number, but many journalists are in Taliban prisons. So we are trying to protest this situation at least on social media. We are trying to ask the Taliban to release them, but there is no channel to talk to the Taliban. They are not listening.

What are the journalists in exile doing about this where they are?

I talk a lot about exiled journalists in my speeches, because this is one of the few actions we can do from here. We have to at least work to document the behavior and actions of the Taliban against people. So at least we try to inform around us and give a voice to the people in the country. But it's definitely very difficult. You know, when you work in exile you have a lot of difficulties. We have security issues that can make us targets. Also when we are in exile we have to follow the rules of these countries, you know, we have to integrate into this society and we are all refugees at the same time. We are struggling with financial problems. But I think if we want to be with those who are left behind, if we want to at least help, we have to at least face these difficulties for our people who are there alone with the Taliban.

What was the biggest challenge you faced as a journalist in exile?

I had problems with the safety of my family, my family left Afghanistan very quickly because of the pressure from the Taliban. I am also worried about the safety of my colleagues in Afghanistan and here and I have great concerns. Financial difficulties for a journalist in exile are a common



I HAVE NO COUNTRY, NO HOME, NO FAMILY

How did your life change after your interview with Angela Jolie?

Not much has changed. Because I am a journalist, I have my own voice, my own platform, so I think it was a privilege to be chosen by Time Magazine and to interview Angelina Jolie. But sometimes when I see famous people around me who are interested in me, it gives me a good feeling. I have no country, no home, no family. On the other hand, I am surrounded by good and caring people. This is a happy feeling for me.

Is there a chance for new journalists to grow in Afghanistan?

Unfortunately, the chance for women journalists is zero. Because the Taliban has banned journalism education for women. Still, there is a chance for many of them. At least they can study journalism at university. But my advice to women journalists is not to give up yet. Be hopeful. Fight for your rights. Eventually we will overcome these difficulties. Also Rukhshana Media, my organization, is a very unique platform for women journalists. We have this kind of privilege to give them a chance to become journalists.

problem for all of us. Our working time zone does not fit Afghanistan. We face a time difference. ■

** Joya was one of the 12 women chosen as Time's Woman of the Year in 2022. She was recognized for her journalism and interviewed Angelina Jolie. On September 20, 2022, Joya received the 2022 Changemaker Award from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In December 2022, she was honored as one of the BBC 100 Women. Rukhshana Media received the Marie Colvin Award at the British Journalism Awards 2021.*

40-DAY STRIKE AGAINST THE RADICAL RIGHT

Strikes by journalists are not forgotten in French media history. The longest strike in history lasted 7 weeks in 1968 by ORTF employees. The strike at Radio France in 2015 lasted 27 days. Now JDD staff have ended their 40-day strike, which began on 22 June 2023, in protest at the appointment of a new editor-in-chief.



LOU PHILY *

“Geoffroy Lejeune will take up his new post today in an empty newsroom.”

Fith these words, the staff of JDD Magazine, the Sunday edition of the French weekly JDD (Le Journal du Dimanche), announced the end of a 40-day strike that began on 22 June in protest at the appointment of a new editor-in-chief, Geoffroy Lejeune. Lejeune, a 34-year-old journalist, was previously editor-in-chief of the far-right magazine Valeurs Actuelles. Under Lejeune’s leadership, the magazine published an article in 2020 depicting a black French MP, Danièle Obono, as a slave, and was subsequently found guilty of public racial insults in November 2022.

FAR-RIGHT JOURNALISTS

The struggle of the JDD journalists has begun to show that in the history of France, such incidents have been a futile endeavour. In recent years, many media outlets controlled by billionaires have hired famous journalists or personalities who support and publish far-right ideologies.

The first incident in 2016 and the current one have little in common. Journalists at the i-Télé television channel went on strike for a month to protest against the hiring of Jean-Marc Morandini, a close friend of Vincent Bolloré, the main shareholder of the Canal+ media group, of which they are a subsidiary. Morandini, at 20 the youngest TV presenter in France,



was given a suspended prison sentence for bribing minors. The same businessman, Bolloré, has now bought JDD.

To preserve the integrity of the editorial office, the striking journalists demanded the dismissal of the famous TV presenter and guarantees of editorial independence by appointing one of Vincent Bolloré's two close friends as editor-in-chief and the other as director. The management did not accept the journalists' proposal. As a result, more than 30 journalists quit their jobs. In 2021, i-Télé television was fined 200,000 euros for hate speech and received a warning from the CSA (an organisation that regulates the media) for giving more airtime to the far-right Rassemblement National party during the 2021 regional elections.

Vincent Bolloré has used his wealth to dominate media and advertising companies. Bolloré, a 71-year-old French businessman who Forbes predicts will be worth \$10 billion by 2023, was born into the bourgeoisie in Brittany in north-west France. At the age of 23, he was appointed vice-president of the Edmond de Rothschild Group, a financial institution. Together with his brother, Michel-Yves Bolloré, he took the helm of the family's multinational business, known as the Bolloré Group, which is active in many sectors of the economy.

Bolloré has used his wealth to control several media and advertising companies, and in 2012 became the main shareholder in Vivendi, the French mass media conglomer-

ate that owns the Canal+ media group, known for its often politically provocative programming.

In 2015, a documentary about tax evasion in France was pulled from Canal+ to protect the interests of the Bolloré group. One of the channel's most famous programmes was 'Les Guignols de l'info'. After 30 years, it was surprisingly cancelled in 2018.

It was said that Bolloré had no tolerance for political parodies. But for years, Bolloré, a businessman who has followed similar paths to take control of the media industry, has been known to fire journalists or executives he dislikes and replace them with his or his sons' old friends. With such appointments, he has gradually moved the media he patronises to the political right and conservative side.

He also took over the Europe 1 radio station. He then transferred Pascal Praud, a journalist known for his defence of far-right ideologies. Praud, who defended the ideology of the "theory of great change", which is believed to have been instrumental in the rise of the far right in Europe and especially in France, has now taken his place at his side. In June 2023, he also bought Paris Match magazine. However, the shady nature of this purchase is still under investigation. It is alleged that Bolloré interfered with the publication before buying it. The magazine's former editor-in-chief was sacked in 2022, shortly after he objected to a cover story about a traditionalist cardinal. ►

► FLAWED FRONT PAGE

The staff of JDD stood together to oppose the takeover of the magazine by the investor Bolloré. On each day of the 40-day strike, a vote was held among the staff. Each ballot received more than 95 per cent of the votes. The only thing they were able to negotiate with their new boss was the announcement of the resignation of 60 other journalists who refused to accept the editorial management appointed by him and who did not leave their colleagues who were determined to quit their jobs.

Emmanuel Poupard, general secretary of the SNJ, France's first journalists' union, expressed his support: "We must recognise the historic mobilisation of journalists to defend their identity and pluralism".

In the end, Bolloré won. The editorial offices of the magazine emptied. Only two journalists remained. A few days after the end of the strike, the new editor officially took over. With less than a week to go, he had the difficult task of preparing the new issue of JDD, which was to be published on Sunday 6 August. He recruited well-known media personalities such as Pascal Praud and former far-right journalists from Valeurs actuelles.

The new team's first magazine hit the shelves with a big mistake on the front page. A march for Enzo, who was killed in France last July, was confused with Enzo, who died in a car accident in January. The similarity of the names caused a major scandal for the new editorial team. Most sponsors withdrew their advertisements and abandoned the magazine.

"With the new editor-in-chief, the magazine that once gave a voice to all politicians is now openly becoming a propaganda tool for the far right," warned Emmanuel Poupard, general secretary of the SNJ: "JDD is now being compared to France Soir, famous for its post-war conspiracy theories. Once upon a time, the JDD had a non-partisan editorial approach".

BOYCOTT BY POLITICIANS

Sabrina Agresti-Roubache, deputy minister for urban development, was the first political guest immediately after the strike. After Agresti-Roubache was reprimanded by the Prime Minister for her behaviour, members of the government were warned not to give interviews to the JDD, France Info reported. Other politicians, such as Socialist Party leader Olivier Faure and Green

Party leader Marine Tondelier, have also announced a boycott of the magazine.

This is not the first time that Bolloré has had problems with the media. It has filed numerous lawsuits against journalists investigating the activities of its companies. In 2016, Mediapart, one of France's independent magazines, published an article about the illegal activities of the Bolloré group in Cameroon. Following this report, the magazine was sued for defamation. However, Mediapart was cleared of all charges in 2019, 2021 and 2022. The court ruled that Bolloré was wrong and stressed that the information uncovered by journalists is an important issue in the public interest and in the defence of freedom of the press.

BOLLORÉ EXPLOITS LEGAL LOOPHOLE

Press organisations in France are calling for legislative changes to guarantee press freedom and media independence. Emmanuel Poupard recalled that a 2016 law is in force to prevent the silencing of the press and said, "We have said from the beginning that this law is not enough. Parliament must recognise the seriousness of the situation and take urgent action. Successive governments have ignored the problem. Bolloré is taking advantage of this vacuum".

According to economist Julia Cagé, nine billionaire businessmen own 80 per cent of the mainstream media in France. Cagé says that while the media sector needs new investors, the fact that it is made up of billionaires is a big problem because these billionaires have multiple interests to defend.

Parliament is expected to debate a bill in the coming days that would require "the appointment of a new editor-in-chief to be approved by a majority of working journalists". The bill is backed by the SNJ journalists' union. "If the bosses don't threaten journalists with losing their jobs by saying that the loss of state subsidies would mean bankruptcy, it would be useful," Poupard said.

But the bill would be a first step in mobilising against the businessmen's games with the fragile independence of the French media. The unionist adds: "Taking up this issue is a courageous step. Our voices have not been heard on this issue since 2016." ■

** Lou Phily is a French journalist who writes mainly about national and international news for French newspapers and worked as a business news reporter for Thomson Reuters in 2021.*



PHOTO: THOMAS SAMSON / AFP



Vincent Bolloré

EXILED JOURNALISTS MUST ACT TOGETHER

Unfortunately, dissident journalists in exile are not succeeding in building a common network of resistance and solidarity. The report prepared by the IJA shows this and we hope it will be a start for solidarity.



DR. KEZBAN KARAGÖZ *

For the media in Turkey, 2023 was once again a year of intimidation, violence and repression. In 2016, the process of lowering journalistic standards with a sharp break in political developments continues almost every year, with new formulas being found. In terms of media ownership and the political economy of the media, a significant part of the Turkish media is broadcasting as an instrument of the regime and a tool for the production of consent. On the other hand, in this process of filtering the truth, the opposition groups in particular have been starved of accurate information. Despite all the pressure from the regime, which sets the agenda, people are searching for the truth, especially in the digital media. Turkey is one of the most active users of Twitter (now known as X). It was found that 16.1 million peo-

ple in Turkey used Twitter/X in 2022. It was found that the number of users in Turkey was much higher than the number of users in countries such as Germany, Spain and France. One of the things that triggers this demand is that people have the opportunity to create their own real agenda through Twitter/X. In this respect, social media has also become an important platform for journalism. Many independent journalists have been able to use these channels to make their voices heard by the masses without the need for an institutionalised media organ. For repressive regimes like Turkey, however, any uncontrolled move is seen as a problem. In 2023, the regime in Turkey has put more systematic pressure on social media. Because whoever controls information controls society. If there is no information, there is no problem; if there is no news, it is much easier to motivate the masses. Twitter/X posts are constantly being taken to court, and there is an attempt to monitor and control both the press and ordinary people through pressure. The pressure on social media has reached such a serious point that even people living abroad who have no political leanings feel the need to check whether there is an investigation against them when they go to Turkey. In this respect, you can say that the shadow of the regime is over everyone. ►



PHOTO: PIXABAY

► COMMUNICATION OR PROPAGANDA?

We are in another phase where the regime is waging war against opposition journalists living abroad by further suppressing digital media. To this end, it invests in lobbying organisations when necessary. The Directorate of Communication, controlled by Fahrettin Altun, works as a propaganda office rather than an official organisation. Many smear campaigns are systematised and disseminated from a single source.

In 2016 and afterwards, while the opposition media was silenced by decrees and illegally filed lawsuits, journalists and digital newspapers that raised their voices on social media received their share of the regime's hate crimes. In this tunnel of decrees, darkness is spreading. As people find viral spaces for themselves, the regime focuses on expanding its sphere of power. For example, the disinformation law, passed towards the end of 2022, began to bear fruit in 2023. If a piece of news does not conform to the regime's discourse, it is immediately banned from publication. While the government has made conventional media its own through both media ownership and political economy, one of the most prominent acts of intimidation in 2023 was the silencing of digital newspapers and social media accounts, which are an alternative and even the primary source of news for the new generation. On 6 February 2023, during the earthquake and its aftermath, the regime rendered social media channels virtually useless. It subjected the destruction, which was its own work, to general censorship. It also sabotaged

the flow of accurate news from the earthquake zone. It usurped the right to information and left people helpless in a chaotic environment.

DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM

Journalists who have travelled abroad as the only way to escape the regime's intense repression and violence have also been affected by the Information Law, which can be interpreted as a censorship law in Turkey. Many independent journalists have had their publications arbitrarily suspended or blocked. Lists have also been drawn up to block journalists' Twitter/X accounts. This arbitrariness is also aimed at sabotaging journalistic activities by financially damaging the journalist. In this respect, we are witnessing the silencing of Internet publishing, which provides a space for democratic voices to be heard in the face of authoritarian regimes, under pressure from the regimes. Authoritarian regimes are allocating more and more financial resources every year to dominate social media channels. Opposition spaces for communication and interaction are also threatened by digital authoritarianism. This trend applies not only to the press, but also to broadcasting. TRT's digital platform Tabii was created as an alternative to channels such as Netflix. On the other hand, it can be seen that the content offered is propaganda material. For example, the TV series Metamorphosis is about human rights defender and businessman Osman Kavala. The series portrays Osman Kavala, who has been in prison since 2017 despite ECHR rulings, from the perspective of the AKP. In the se-

The regime labels opposition journalists as terrorists and criminalises their journalistic activities as treason and espionage. The aim is to close the door on even the slightest public support for journalists.

ries, the real story of Osman Kavala is almost reconstructed through the life of Teoman Bayramlı, which is mixed with the story of a capitalist businessman and an agent who provides important information about the country to the USA. Of course, none of the injustices suffered by Kavala are mentioned in the series. The regime imposes its own reality on its own platform. The series was recently moved from TRT's digital platform Tabi to TRT 1. This means that the fictional realities will now become much more widespread.

DIGITAL VIOLENCE OF THE DICTATOR

Journalists who are forced to migrate from Turkey's precarious news production environment continue to be the recipients of the regime's repressive tools even as they migrate. The government, which has recently turned to digital methods of violence, is gradually expanding its sphere of power. Although forced migration is a breathing space for journalists, being targeted by the regime and even being used as a bargaining chip like a political hostage rightly makes them uneasy. On the other hand, it also shows how much the regime is afraid of journalists who publish in digital spaces, which are still not as powerful as traditional media. The pressure has gradually increased as publications have begun to reach the masses. Names like Cevheri Güven are now followed by a much wider range of people, and their news is covered in the mainstream Turkish media. On the other hand, journalists in exile report what the media in Turkey dare not. For this reason, exiled journalists are often the target of smear campaigns by the regime's media. By exerting intense pressure on exiled journalists, the regime aims to further intimidate journalists who remain in the country, as well as to control the information disseminated by exiled journalists and even to eliminate their voice

altogether.

WHY DO EXILED JOURNALISTS NOT SHOW SOLIDARITY?

While all these developments are taking place, we are preparing a report on the fact that journalists in exile are the target of the regime's acts of intimidation and harassment. The report will analyse the regime's use of physical and digital violence against journalists in exile in Turkey in 2023, the smear campaigns, the use of lawsuits for intimidation policies and the solidarity networks against all this. Some of the dangerous methods include exposing some journalists in the regime's media in violation of their personal rights, defamation and insult. While the regime weaves its web, the opposition journalists in exile are not successful enough in building a common resistance and solidarity network. It is increasingly important to ask what more can be done in this regard, and how solidarity networks can develop in digital or offline environments.

The regime labels opposition journalists as terrorists and criminalises their journalistic activities as treason and espionage. The regime wants to close the door completely on even the weak public support for journalists.

To be a journalist in exile is to be targeted by the regime. The report concludes with a summary that discusses the means by which institutional support can empower journalists.

The unfair and unlawful treatment of journalists in exile is reported by some opposition channels in Turkey.

One point we emphasise in the report is the coverage of exiled journalists who have been subjected to the same unfair treatment and who used to work in the central media. In this respect, journalists who are slandered in the regime's media, who are the subject of defamatory headlines and who are targeted by the regime on social media are once again discriminated against.

Kurdish journalists and journalists working in institutions closed by the state of emergency decree are also subjects of marginalisation and even hate speech by the opposition media in Turkey. This situation puts the opposition press and media in a more useful position than the regime media. All this shows that solidarity networks to be established on behalf of exiled journalists, especially in the international media, are becoming more and more important today. We hope that this report will be a start for such solidarity. ■

** Kezban Karagöz, an Amnesty Netherlands volunteer working on human rights abuses, holds a master's degree and a doctorate in journalism from Istanbul University. She holds a press card from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).*



ESTHER NAKKAZI *

Freedom against difficulties in Uganda

In Uganda, the government has recognized the need to modernize media laws to adapt to changing journalistic platforms and has pledged to consult with stakeholders on comprehensive changes.

Tn Uganda, nine journalists were arrested in 2022 for cyber-stalking President Yoweri Museveni and making threatening statements. They were released following raids by civil society organizations.

The Ugandan government is seeking to amend the Press and Journalists Act to extend it to online media. The government unanimously spearheaded the amendment of the Computer Misuse Act. This amendment brought with it severe penalties. The prospect of restrictions on freedom of expression and media rights has raised concerns among human rights activists and journalists.

The Uganda Law Association is challenging the law as unconstitutional, citing irregularities in its adoption and its inconsistency with the constitutional provisions on freedom of expression. Journalists and lawyers have also petitioned the

Constitutional Court to annul the amendments, objecting to the broad language used in the definition of 'unwanted information'. The Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the petitioners in January 2023, declaring Article 25 of the Computer Misuse Act null and void.

Section 25, which has been used to target government critics such as Robert Shaka and Joseph Kabuleta, has previously faced offensive accusations. Academic and activist Stella Nyanzi was arrested and convicted under the law for criticizing President Museveni on social media. In September 2022, Teddy Nalubowa was similarly charged with offensive communications, highlighting the government's crackdown on the opposition. Concerns about government surveillance have emerged, with evidence of illegal wiretapping and the purchase of spyware from foreign sources.



PHOTO: ISAAC KASAMANI / AFP

Access to information remained difficult for journalists, with many important requests for information being held up or denied. The government acknowledged the need to modernize media laws to adapt to changing journalistic platforms and pledged to consult with stakeholders on comprehensive changes.

The government's control over the media extended to the advertising sector with the centralization of public advertising from 2019-2020. Advertising revenues were critical for media outlets and the government became the largest advertiser. Strict advertising guidelines for electronic media, introduced in October 2019, restricted the content that could be sponsored or advertised on television and radio stations. This included restrictions on news, current affairs and religious services, raising concerns about the independence of editorial teams. However, there was a glimmer of hope when the government agreed to include only digital media in the advertising budget and changed procurement laws accordingly.

Amid these challenges, internal divisions in the media sector exacerbated the situation. Disagreements emerged over who should run the sector, leading to a lack of harmonized self-regu-

lation. The government's efforts to use the Computer Misuse Act to regulate online media were seen as a response.

Journalists continued to push for self-regulation, arguing that the government would withdraw its intervention due to the implementation of this law. However, the government emphasized the importance of regulation, citing journalistic ethics and the need for joint regulatory mechanisms. Existing institutions, such as NIJU, have become dysfunctional due to competition among journalists, hampering self-regulation efforts.

As a result, the media landscape in Uganda is characterized by government attempts to control both traditional and online media, the passage and subsequent repeal of amendments to the Computer Misuse Act, and ongoing debates within the sector on self-regulation. Journalists and activists are determined to defend freedom of expression and media rights in the face of these challenges. ■

** Esther Nakkazi is a freelance science and technology journalist. She is a Uganda ScieGirl blogger; media trainer; and founder of the Uganda Association of Health Journalists.*



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