

A MEDIA PANORAMA: ANALYSIS OF THE MESSAGES PUBLISHED BY THE JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION OF TURKEY IN TERMS OF “PRESS FREEDOM”

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Abstract

Turkish Journalists Association (TGC) is Turkey's largest press professional organization. As of November 2022, it has 3 thousand 780 main members. In order to become a member of the association, the conditions for contractual employment in the written and visual media, subject to the Press Labor Law No. 5953 (commonly known as Law No. 212), having a press card and having at least 2 years of professional seniority are required. TGC is especially sensitive to the issue of press freedom, not only protecting the professional and personal rights of member journalists, but also focusing on general problems of the media, and accordingly organizes press releases, conferences, panels, actions, etc. appears to have been accomplished. In recent years, the Society has been announcing its objections, reservations and criticisms regarding press freedom to the public through press statements (messages) at almost every opportunity. These press releases are published both on the Society's website and shared via social media and e-mail. In this study, by conducting content and discourse analysis, it was tried to determine which topics, words/concepts TGC included in the 155 press releases/messages published between January 1, 2022 and November 1, 2022, and to what extent it attaches importance to the issue of press freedom. Thus, through the messages of the largest press professional organization, a panorama of the main problems faced by the media in Turkey in recent years has been created.

Keywords: TGC, Press freedom, Media, Journalists

JEL Code: Z00, Z10, Z19

BİR MEDYA PANORAMASI: TÜRKİYE GAZETECİLER CEMİYETİ’NİN YAYIMLADIĞI MESAJLARIN “BASIN ÖZGÜRLÜĞÜ” AÇISINDAN ANALİZİ

Öz

Türkiye Gazeteciler Cemiyeti (TGC), Türkiye'nin en büyük basın meslek örgütüdür. Kasım 2022 tarihi itibarıyla 3 bin 780 asıl üyesi bulunmaktadır. Cemiyete üye olmak için, yazılı ve görsel basında 5953 sayılı Basın İş Kanunu'na (yaygın adıyla 212 sayılı yasa) tabi olarak sözleşmeli çalışma, basın kartı sahibi olma ve en az 2 yıllık meslek kıdemine sahip olma koşulu aranmaktadır. TGC'nin özellikle basın özgürlüğü konusuna duyarlılık gösterdiği, sadece üye gazetecilerin mesleki ve özlük haklarını korumakla yetinmeyip, aynı zamanda medyanın genel sorunlarına da eğildiği ve bu doğrultuda basın açıklamaları, konferanslar, paneller, eylemler vb. gerçekleştirdiği görülmektedir. Cemiyet, son yıllarda, basın özgürlüğü konusundaki itirazlarını, çekincelerini ve eleştirilerini hemen her fırsatta basın açıklamaları (mesajları) yoluyla kamuoyuna duyurmaktadır. Bu basın açıklamaları hem Cemiyetin web sitesinde yayımlanmakta hem de sosyal medya ve e-mail yoluyla paylaşılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, içerik ve söylem analizi yapılarak, TGC'nin 1 Ocak 2022-1 Kasım 2022 tarihleri arasındaki dönemde yayımladığı 155 basın açıklamasında/mesajda hangi konulara, kelime/kavramlara yer verdiği ve basın özgürlüğü konusunu ne ölçüde önemseydiği belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Böylece, en büyük basın meslek örgütünün mesajları üzerinden, Türkiye'de medyanın son yıllarda karşılaştığı başlıca sorunların bir panoraması çıkarılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: TGC, Basın özgürlüğü, Medya, Gazeteciler

JEL Sınıflaması: Z00, Z10, Z19

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1. Introduction

Freedom of the press, in its broadest sense, is defined as the freedom to freely collect, interpret, criticize, print, reproduce and these freely publish and distribute news, ideas and thoughts (Balkanlı, 1961, p.23; Dönmezer, 1976, p.41; Özkorkut, 2002, p.67; cited by Horozgil, 2012, p.148). Freedom of the press plays a vital role both in the formation and expression of thought (Sancar, 2006, p.218, 219). The First Amendment to the United States Constitution states that “Congress cannot make laws restricting (...) freedom of speech or freedom of the press.” (Alstyne, 1984; Collins and Skover, 1990, p.1087-1093; cited by Erdem, 2017, p.18). In this respect, freedom of the press is an indispensable form of breathing for all societies.

Turkey, on the other hand, has long been experiencing problems with freedom of the press. According to Kurban and Sözeri (2013, p.1), who contributed to the TESEV report, “the state has dominated the press through political pressure and has managed to create a biased media through political favoritism and economic favoritism practices. Fear of state oppression, lack of an independent journalistic practice and dependence on state financial support have caused the media to position itself next to the political power, even after the end of the single-party regime and the transition to multi-party life.”

Except for the interim periods when democracy tried to be established on a certain basis, there have been constant problems and obstacles regarding the people's freedom of information for years, and mainly the governments and, at least partially, the opposition have made efforts to control the press. Especially since the 2000s, a widespread communication and news traffic has occurred with the increasing number of TV news channels. In order not to create a chaotic situation, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) was established to provide legal intervention first to some TV programmes, then to news programmes, and finally to news and discussion programmes. The fact that RTÜK members are composed of representatives proposed by the parties that have a group in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) has been evaluated as "intervention in the media through politics".

Although the fact that the political ground had been based on single-party power since the early 2000s led to the expectation that democratic life could develop in contrast to the apparently *passive structure* of the coalition governments of the past, the *potentness* had, as always, resulted in the concentration of power in a single hand. Over the years, the media world has also received its share of this negativity. The business people who held the

ownership of the media and jointly directed the operation of the press until the early 2000s were gradually eliminated, and were replaced by other business people who were just like them and close to the government. In this process, the Turkish press witnessed the largest liquidation of journalists in its history, and press organizations that survived with state subsidies, such as TRT and Anatolian Agency (A.A.), which were relatively more autonomous in the past, have also suffered great structural deformation over time. As of the end of 2022, a large portion of newspapers and TV channels are in the hands of pro-government media organizations.

In this process, "pressure" was applied to the opposition part of the press -as a traditional attitude- both by RTÜK, both the Press Announcement Agency and the courts, and the reflex of the media was tried to be narrowed by law. According to the 2022 World Press Freedom Index prepared by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Turkey ranked 149th out of 180 countries (<https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-61307115>). However, according to the 2005 report, Turkey was ranked 98th in the World Press Freedom Index. The fact that Turkey has fallen by 51 steps in the past 17 years is an indication of the narrowed dimensions of the freedom of the press.

However, it is not enough to try to control the written and visual media by changing ownership, applying pressure, and appointing pro-government names to the executive department, and this time social media platforms and internet media are described as "cracked voice". As a matter of fact, the Law No 7418 on the Amendment of Press Law and Some Laws, which is described as "social media law" according to the government and "the law of censorship" according to the opposition, is published in the Official Gazette on 18 October 2002 and enter into force (<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2022/10/20221018-1.htm>). According to the new law, a person who shares information that is suitable for disrupting public order may be sentenced to imprisonment from 1 to 3 years. In addition, if the information requested by the legal authorities is not provided by the social media law, it is stipulated that the internet traffic bandwidth of the social network providers can be reduced by 90 percent (<https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2022/gundem/sosyal-medya-yasasi-maddeler-nedir-sosyal-medya-duzenlemesi-yasalasti-mi-7418087/>). With this law, the freedom area of social media is faced with the threat of punishment, just like in the written and visual media, on the grounds of "control". The opposition evaluated this initiative as an attempt to neutralize the media in the process leading up to the 2023 elections. CHP applied to the Constitutional Court

for the annulment of article 29 of the law and suspension of its enforcement. The Supreme Court decided to examine the application on the merits.

Although the Journalists Association of Turkey (TGC) is a professional organization, like an NGO, it reacted especially to the attempts to restrict the freedom of the press. The Association, evaluated the violation of the ethical rules of journalism and the pressure of power on the axis of democracy and tried to develop options for this.

2. Purpose of the research

The aim of the study is based on the extent to which the Journalists Association of Turkey attaches importance to the issue of freedom of the press. In this direction, it aims to make determinations about the attitude of professional press organizations on freedom of the press, to analyze its positive and negative aspects, and thus to make predictions about the future.

2.1. Research questions

In this study, the freedom of press in TGC's messages, the attitude towards the government regarding the problems faced by the media, and the alternatives offered regarding freedom of the press are included as questions.

The questions of the study are as follows:

- a) To what extent does TGC include the freedom of the press in its messages?
- b) Does TGC criticize and/or condemn the government regarding the problems faced by the media in the messages?
- c) Has TGC put forward an alternative in the messages regarding freedom of the press?

2.2. Scope and limitations of the research

In the study, 155 press releases/messages published by the Turkish Journalists Association between January 1, 2022 and November 1, 2022 are discussed.

2.3. Research method

In this study, using content and discourse analysis, it is determined which topics, concepts and facts are dominant in the messages published by TGC; thus, it is tried to create a panorama about the media order and functioning in Turkey.

3. The problem of freedom of the press in Turkey

Freedom of the press is the freedom to "disclose news, ideas and thoughts freely by means of multiplier". It includes the right to freely collect information and ideas, to reproduce them by commenting and criticism, and to publish and distribute them freely (Dönmezer, 1976, p.41). The press is an important tool not only for the expression of thought, but also for its creation. It is a kind of barometer of democracy (Charon, 1992, p.201). The phenomenon that brings together the concepts of press and democracy is freedom of thought.

It is known that the press in Turkey was established by the state. The history of the Turkish press began with the Vekayi-i Mısriyye Newspaper published in 1828 (Erdem, 2017, p.60). While newspaper bosses were generally trained in journalism until 1948, businessmen began to take an interest in the press from this date on, and a new era opened in the press. The 1980s were another turning point in the Turkish press in terms of laying the foundations of monopolization in the press (Erdem, 2017, p.65-66). According to Tokgöz (2017, p.50), with the entry of new holdings into the media in the 1980s, the media ownership left the hands of journalist families and began to pass into the hands of the big giants of the Turkish economy. Since the second half of the 1990s, with the spread of private televisions, the press sector was completely surrounded by holdings, thus the first major *break* in the traditional process of the media.

The real big break occurred in the years following 2007-2008. A new era started when the AKP won the elections held on July 22, 2007 by 47 percent and the closure case against the AKP was concluded in favor of this party the following year. The AKP government was only able to accelerate the steps of establishing its own historical bloc in this period; because since 2007, the dominance in the central institutions and organizations of the old historical bloc has gradually shifted in favor of the AKP, and the ruling party has gained important positions against the old bloc (Ayan, 2019, p.27-28). While this superiority continued to exist increasingly as a "power" in the period from 2008 to July 15, 2016, after the coup attempt on July 15, the media entered a period in which they would experience difficulties in terms of freedom of the press. In this period, there were almost no intermediate tones in the Turkish press, and the media stepped into a vicious process as a black and white picture:

“The third term of AKP; In addition to closing media outlets and changing their ownership structures, there had also been a period when trustees were appointed to these organizations, journalists were left unemployed, pushed into the background, threatened, attacked, detained and even arrested. Therefore, the Turkish media had not only been brought to its knees (...), but the physical or psychological pressure directed at media organizations and journalists by the government had also put the media under the control of the AKP. Practices such as pressure, force, threats, defamation, arrests

and targeting were almost the only policy implemented by the AKP to the entire society, especially between 2016 and 2018” (Ayan, 2019, p.217).

As a matter of fact, according to the 2021-2022 Press Freedom Report (2022), prepared by the Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS); 23,907 of the registered employees in the Press, Broadcasting and Journalism business line carry out journalism activities. According to the data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), while the general unemployment rate is 12% in 2021, the unemployment rate for journalism graduates is 18.3%. 26 journalists are in prison for their press activities. Journalists are mostly accused of "membership in an armed organization" and "making propaganda for a terrorist organization". In addition, in the last 1 year, 31 journalists have been detained for 52 days in total, 60 journalists have been investigated, 273 journalists have been tried in 128 cases, and journalists have been sentenced to a total of 75 years, 5 months and 26 days in prison, 57 journalists have been physically attacked, 32 journalists have been verbally threatened. Access to 54 news sites and 1,355 news content is blocked, and it is decided to remove 19 news from the content. Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) imposed an administrative fine of 10,427,902 TL in total with 61 separate decisions. In 2021, 559 press cards are cancelled. Press and Announcement Institution imposed a total penalty of 25 days for newspapers (Cumhuriyet is sentenced to 16, Evrensel to 5, Sözcü to be sentenced to 4 days).

While the general panorama on the media order in Turkey is like this, the attitude of professional press organizations is also framed by the level of closeness to the government or the opposition. While there are not a single objection raised by the pro-government professional organizations or associations regarding press freedom violations, the criticisms against the government are almost treated as "debauchery" and "separatism". Even Abdurrahman Dilipak, who left the pro-government Yeni Akit newspaper, reacted to this approach by republishing a column in 2019:

“For some, the duty of media dogs is "gatekeeper". Deterrence, questioning, filtering against disinformation expected from them... If someone tries to come at you through the press, you also have a press. Or you can defend yourself against false-false allegations about you or you have the opportunity to respond to the other party in the same way... In other words, you say to the people in front of you that "two can play at that game". You show your media like you are showing a gun under a jacket... (...) There are those who see and use the media as a "Trojan Horse". For some, the media is a trampoline, for some a "flagship" for "total war", for some an "attack base", for some a "shield", for some a "deterrent weapon"... (...)The press also blesses itself; it is the deception of what they call the public interest. There is only one public interest, and that is the dominance of the nation, its own leader, organization, ideology and political thought and belief. Others are either ignorant or treacherous... The press is free but others are not? Can freedom justify posing a clear and imminent threat to the

rights and freedoms of others, and hostile attitudes towards their reputation?" (<https://www.habervakti.com/dilipak-yazdi-media-kimin-kopegi>).

It is noteworthy that in the process in question, pro-government journalists and columnists also complained about violations of press freedom from time to time.

3.1. Media order and TGC in Turkey

Turkish Journalists Association (TGC) is Turkey's largest professional media organization. As of November 2022, there are 3 thousand 780 permanent members. In order to become a member of the Association, it is required to work under a contract in the written and visual media, subject to the Press Labor Law No. 5953 (commonly known as the Law No.212), to have a press card and to have at least 2 years of professional experience. These conditions indicate that it is not easy to become a member of the organization. Certain criteria are sought for membership, and those who fulfill them can be admitted to the Association.

Since the media system in Turkey is not exempt from social conditions, restrictions, pressures and obstructions on the written and visual media are continuous. TGC reacts to this situation by means of press statements (messages) it publishes, sometimes it organizes joint press conferences with other press professional organizations or makes joint written statements depending on the weight of the issue. TGC, which is supposed to take steps to improve the personal rights and working conditions of its member journalists under normal circumstances, works to expand the narrowed space of the media due to *the conjuncture*.

According to Mutlu (2005, p.208-209), under normal conditions, in the communication age we live in, digitalization not only constitutes the most important link in the globalization of communication, but also changes the way of communication, and therefore our way of thinking, perceiving and comprehending. Even before that, developments in communication technologies at the end of the last century caused changes in the institutional structure of the media. Media tools that are renewing themselves day by day with the giant media organizations that emerged as a result of developments such as mergers, mergers, acquisitions and international partnerships are made available to large masses. The undeniable reality of today is the rapid spread of the West and especially the American culture through the globalizing media (Ayık, 2019, p.42). The argument that power relations are increasingly under their control in favor of global media conglomerates in the digital age is very simple, but difficult to refute (Fenton, 2020, p.35). The most important emphasis on the media dimension of globalization is this change in the institutional structure. However, while the

aforementioned change manifested itself similarly all over the world, an accidental situation emerged in Turkey: Between the years 2000-2015 and later, the media order created by globalization changed ownership and is handed over to the *conservative capital*.

Especially after the 2001 crisis, media ownership started to change hands gradually. Relatively moderate and liberal media bosses have begun to give way to conservative and pro-government bosses. Names close to the government such as Albayrak Family, Ethem Sancak, Erdoğan-Yıldırım Demirören, Kalyoncu Family, Hasan Yeşildağ have almost 90 percent of the Turkish media. Thus, the era of mediocracy, which expresses the dominance of the media, has ended, and the era of mediocracy, in which the government establishes hegemony through the media, has begun. These newspapers and TV channels, which are described as "partisan media" by the opposition, have begun to "one-stop" even their headlines. Not only the brain of the media, but also the structure of the spine has changed. In the words of Lee McIntyre (2022, p.86), "How could adhering to journalistic values such as objectivity, honesty, rigor, and balance lead to distraction from the truth?" Truth and reality took the form of verses presented from a single source.

At this point, not only the print media but also TV channels entered the mediocracy process. The news bulletins of the TV channels close to the government started to turn into the program "İcraatın İçinden" (Through the Action) of the 1980s. Public opinion was bombarded with propaganda. Perception management has created an ossified structure in society through mediocracy. Citizens were not provided with opportunities to distinguish between right and wrong, and a policy of "stupidizing" was pursued thanks to manipulation, perception management and news framing. Thus, the thread of reality has been broken, and "lie" has been replaced in the void that has arisen. In the words of Byung-Chul Han (2021, pp.10-11), "The immune paradigm and the globalization process are not in harmony. The otherness that caused the immune reaction would have resisted the process of disintegration." "Immunity" here means a protective response to a risk. Based on this analogy, the following can be said: Although it does not fully comply with Byung-Chul Han's metaphor of globalization, the Turkish media developed itself in the globalization process, made its technological breakthroughs, adapted its structure to digitalization, but eventually surrendered to *the virus*.

For example, for about 10 years in Turkey, the press conferences, rallies, visits, opening ceremonies and speeches of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, first as the Prime Minister and then as the President, have been broadcast live by all news channels, with the exception of 1-2 TV channels. No broadcaster has dared to interrupt Erdogan's speech. During the election periods,

while Erdogan is speaking, live broadcasts are sometimes made 5-6 times a day and these live broadcasts continue for hours. The opposition, on the other hand, has the chance to appear on the screen with live broadcast at the Assembly group meeting, which is usually held on Tuesdays, only once a week. How long this live broadcast will last or whether it will be interrupted is at the mercy of media managers.

Within this media system, the Journalists Association of Turkey has undertaken the function of acting sensitively and raising awareness about the freedom of the press.

4. Analysis of TGC's press releases

In the study, 155 press releases/messages published by the Turkish Journalists Association between January 1, 2022 and November 1, 2022 are discussed. In the aforementioned messages, the reactions of the TGC in the face of freedom of the press and events such as blocking, banning and attack in this direction are analyzed, and the contents of 155 messages are shown in tables.

In addition, by conducting a discourse analysis of the messages, the difficulties faced by the Turkish media regarding freedom of the press are tried to be examined from a critical point of view.

47 of the 155 messages published by the Association are about freedom of the press, attacks and threats against journalists. The number of commemorative and congratulatory messages on important days is 44. Visits to the Association and routine meetings are the subject of 26 messages. Awards and exhibitions come in third place with 24 explanations and messages. The number of messages regarding the personal rights of journalists is 8. 5 of the messages are condolences and funeral statements, and one of them is the difficulties experienced by the press in the face of international developments.

Table 1: Thread transcripts in TGC's messages

Freedom of the press	Attack and threat to journalists	Commemoration /celebration on important days	Visits and routine meetings	Awards and exhibitions	Personal rights of journalists	Condolences and funeral	International developments
36	11	44	26	24	8	5	1

Content and discourse analysis of 27 of 36 messages about "freedom of the press", which is the subject of the study, is conducted. The other 9 messages, although they are related to the freedom of the press, are not taken into consideration because they are only "preliminary news".

In the message titled "Democracy cannot be talked about in a country where journalists are not free" published by TGC on January 7, 2022, the views of the Board of Directors of the Turkish Journalists' Association on "January 10 Working Journalists' Day" are included. In the message, it is stated that democracy cannot be mentioned in a country where journalists cannot do their duty and free circulation of news cannot be ensured, and that Turkey is facing a dark picture for the press. In the message, it is emphasized that one-third of the journalists working in hundreds of media organizations that are closed due to the pressure of the government in the last 10 years are unemployed, and that 95 percent of the media is under the control of the government. In the message referring to the previous year, it was stated that broadcast bans, fines, lawsuits, detentions, arrests, censorship and self-censorship have become daily events. In the statement, it is stated that according to the report prepared by the TGC Press Museum Information and Documentation Center, 284 lawsuits are filed against journalists in 2021. It is stated that 141 blocking orders are issued for the news, videos, columns and tweets of journalists, 24 journalists are detained in 19 incidents, and 34 journalists are still in prison. In addition, it is stated that 390 journalists are dismissed in 2021 and 139 resigned due to pressure. It is stated that RTÜK fined Fox TV, Halk TV, Tele1, KRT and Habertürk 71 times and decided to stop broadcasting five times. It is stated that the Press Advertisement Institution has given a total of 110 days of cutting advertisements to the newspapers Birgün, Cumhuriyet, Evrensel and Sözcü. In the message, it was noted that 146 journalists who were targeted in 120 events in 2021 were verbally and physically attacked, and journalists were censored in 80 events and news (TGC, 07.01.2022). In the message of the Association, it is emphasized that democracy cannot be mentioned in a country where journalists cannot perform their duties and the free circulation of news cannot be ensured, and that journalists can work and perform their duties freely is an inseparable part of democracy.

The title of the TGC message on January 22, 2022 is "Detaining journalists will not bring democracy". This time, the Association made a statement regarding the detention of journalist Sedef Kabaş for insulting the President. In the message, it is emphasized that, according to universal journalism principles, freedom of expression includes not only positive and harmless news or thoughts, but also thoughts that "shock, hurt and disturb the state". In

addition, it is emphasized that freedom of expression is one of the most fundamental freedoms of a democratic society, and it is stated that the way to protect public opinion is through freedom of expression. In the statement, it is stated that if journalists are regularly threatened, detained and arrested in the country, both the future and democracy of the society are in danger; it has been stated that the governments have to tolerate even the most severe criticisms directed at them, as well-established jurisprudence of the courts (TGC, 22.01.2022).

The title of the Association's message dated January 24, 2022 is "RTÜK continues to punish journalism". In the statement, the sentences given to Tele1 and Fox TV by RTÜK are criticized. In the statement, it is stated that after the arrest of journalist Sedef Kabaş; at the meeting held by RTÜK, Tele1 is fined 5 percent, and the Democracy Arena program is suspended for 5 weeks. A 3 percent administrative fine was ruled unanimously for Uğur Dündar's criticism of RTÜK President Şahin; it is announced that FOX TV is fined 3 percent due to the statements of main news presenter Selçuk Tepeli.

In the message, it is argued that the decisions of RTÜK are a direct intervention in the profession of journalism and are unconstitutional (TGC, 24.01.2022).

In the TGC's message titled "No one will be able to discredit the journalists" dated February 17, 2022, it was stated that it is almost impossible to do journalism under these conditions by listing the developments in the last week when the freedom of the press was violated. The Association reacted to the approval of the sentences and the arrest of Murat Ağirel, Barış Pehlivan and Hülya Kılınç for their news about the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) personnel who lost their lives in Libya. In addition, Hülya Kılınç, one of these journalists, who was arrested in Manisa and sent to prison, reacted to the appointment of a female police officer from the morality desk, instead of the execution desk police. Moreover, the Association objected to RTÜK's fine and five program suspensions to Halk TV for journalist Ayşenur Arslan's views on the Turkish Resistance Organization (TMT) in Cyprus. Another issue that the Association reacted to is that the owner and reporter of Mersin Haberci newspaper, who made news about the integrated waste facility tender of Mersin Metropolitan Municipality, was attacked by the CHP Provincial Youth Branch with dyed and egg. TGC also reacted to the detention of Mezopotamya Agency (MA) reporter Zeynep Durgut, without justification, during the house raid in Şırnak's Cizre district.

In this message, TGC criticized not only the government but also the Mersin Provincial Youth Branch of the main opposition party CHP. Still, the Association seems hopeful for the future of journalism:

“As you can see, targeting journalists has become commonplace. All kinds of justifications are used for the detention of journalists, without seeking the condition of compliance with the law and justice. It seems that it is almost impossible to do journalism under these conditions. However, this country has a strong journalism vein. No one has the right to hinder, discredit or threaten our colleagues who do this profession with dignity and self-sacrifice. No one will forget these journalists who made a mark on history and were witnesses of the period in which they lived. However, no one will remember and forgive those who showed this injustice, cruelty and violence to journalists” (TGC, 17.02.2022).

The title of the Association's message dated March 28, 2022 is "Another obstacle is being brought to citizens' access to news". TGC stated that with the omnibus law proposal submitted to the Parliament, it would pave the way for new prison sentences to be imposed on journalists. In the message, it was stated that, according to the proposal, three years' imprisonment is in question for the news that would harm the reputation of the companies, and it was claimed that the economy journalists were made a veiled threat (TGC, 28.03.2022).

The target of the message published by TGC on April 7, 2022 is RTÜK. In the statement titled “RTÜK has again blocked the citizens' right to receive information”, it was criticized that Halk TV, KRT and Tele1 were fined for reporting child abuse in a Qur'an Course in Erzurum upon the complaint of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (TGC, 07.04. 2022).

On the same day, Secretary General Sibel Güneş was invited on behalf of the Journalists Association of Turkey to the weekly regular group meeting held by the İyi Party on Wednesday, April 6, 2022, in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. The text of the speech that Güneş gave to the group on the basic problems of journalists was published as a statement of the Association. After drawing attention to the problems of journalists regarding various professional and personal rights, Güneş criticized the freedom of the press in Turkey (TGC, 07.04.2022).

On May 2, 2022, the Association published a message titled “Stop punishing journalism” on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day. In the message, there are also criticisms of the government:

“On World Press Freedom Day, again, we cannot talk about a free press in Turkey. We are trying to do journalism in a country where the rights of journalists are violated, the free circulation of news, the right to a fair trial and citizens' access to news are prevented. In an environment where fundamental rights and freedoms are ignored, the

government and its partners continue to target journalists, pave the way for physical attacks, and reward those who attack journalists with impunity. Keeping journalists in prison on arbitrary accusations, detentions and long periods of detention continues as an insult to democracy (...)

We call on the representatives of the government and all politicians to abandon the mentality that sees journalism and news as a crime, targeting journalists, and to ensure the free circulation of news. We want the journalists in prison to be released, the obstacles to the work and organization of journalists to be removed, and the punishment of journalism to be stopped” (TGC, 02.05.2022).

The title of the TGC's message dated 11 May 2022 is "RTÜK should stop issuing fines on behalf of the government". RTÜK's majority vote to fine Flash TV, Halk TV, Tele1 and KRT on the grounds that CHP Özgür Özel and TİP member Ahmet Şık had humiliated the government in their statements about the Gezi Events has been criticized by The TGC Board of Directors. In the message it published, TGC used the phrase "In order for democracy to flourish in Turkey, news must circulate freely and citizens must access news without censorship." The content of the message is as follows:

“The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), which should be autonomous, interferes with journalism, blocks the news, and carries out the duty of censorship and punishment on behalf of the government. TV channels where the government's practices that are not in the public interest are criticized are definitely punished. (...)

This decision once again revealed that RTÜK bases all its activities on protecting the interests of the government. These decisions, which will economically weaken the media organizations that criticize the government and prevent the employees from receiving their salaries, are also against the Constitution and against the freedom of expression of the press and thought” (TGC, 11.05.2022).

The government's law proposal, which includes regulations regarding social media, was also met with a reaction by the TGC. In the message titled “Social Media Draft Law was prepared to hide the news from the public” dated May 27, 2022, the government was asked to withdraw this draft law:

“Looking at the draft law in general, it was prepared to hide the news from the public on the eve of the election. It will hinder the public's right to be informed and informed. If it becomes law, it will create new crimes, increase the existing censorship on the freedom of expression of the press and thought, and cause many inequalities. The draft law is against freedom of expression in terms of necessity, proportionality and expediency. It is obvious that the methods envisaged by the draft law will result in excessive censorship and therefore pose a danger to freedom of expression.” (TGC, 27.05.2022)

The target of the TGC message published on May 30, 2022 is again RTÜK. RTÜK fined Tele1, KRT, Flash TV and Halk TV, which published the statements and documents of CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, by a high rate of 3 percent. In the statement made by the TGC, titled “RTÜK hinders the public's right to receive information”, it was stated that this penalty

was a blow to the Constitution, freedom of the press, right to information and democracy. In the message, the biggest obstacle to freedom of the press is the fear of punishment and the threat of punishment while broadcasting television and radio news. This decision of the RTÜK will again act as a deterrent from discussing public issues and cause censorship and self-censorship. According to our Constitution, freedom of the press includes the freedom to receive or impart information or ideas without the intervention of official authorities” (TGC, 30.05.2022).

TGC's message dated 2 June 2022 consists of the opinions of the Secretary General of the Association, Sibel Güneş, regarding the Social Media Draft Law, at the Digital Media Commission meeting. During the meeting, Güneş gave information about the Association's report on the draft law, stated why they were against the law, and said that if the draft became law, the freedom of the press and expression of thought would disappear. Sibel Güneş argued that if this draft law is put into effect, any news that the government does not like will be called “disinformation” and a penalty will be demanded (TGC, 02.06.2022).

RTÜK is at the center of the TGC's statement dated 8 June 2022. The attempt to collect the not finalized fines against Tele1 before the election through taxes was criticized in the message titled “RTÜK is in an effort to silence the press”. In the statement, "While it is clear that the final sentences given to Tele 1 were initially unconstitutional, that it would be returned from the judiciary within the scope of Law No. 6112, and that indefinite fines could even be cancelled, acting hastily and trying to silence the press in this way will never be acceptable and will not succeed," the statement said. ” was said (08.06.2022).

In the Association's message, dated 9 June 2022, titled "Citizens' right to receive information should not be denied", the detention of 21 journalists in Diyarbakır in an early morning operation was criticized (TGC, 09.06.2022).

On June 21, 2022, organizations named TGC, TGS, Press Council, TYS, DİSK Basın-İş, PEN Türkiye, TÜRKYAYBİR held a press conference to withdraw the Social Media Draft Law, which was expected to be submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and posted a message which title was "Press Professional Organizations said #NototheCensorshipLaw". Professional Organizations pointed out that the government is trying to aggravate pre-election censorship and self-censorship in order to create a monophonic society (TGC, 21.06.2022).

On June 29, 2022, TGC published a new message titled "RTÜK should stop issuing fines on behalf of the government". In the message, it was emphasized that Halk TV and KRT were

fined due to the complaints of Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu for covering Sedat Peker's allegations, while Tele1 was fined 3 percent for the views in the program called 18 Dakika (18 Minutes). It was stated that administrative sanctions were imposed on TGRT on the grounds that the broadcast ban was not complied with in the program called Gündem (Agenda). On the other hand, it was stated that Radio Sputnik was fined because the name of the alcohol brand was mentioned in the Seyir Hali (Cruising) program (TGC, 29.06.2022).

TGC's message dated 30 June 2022 includes the joint statement of various press professional organizations regarding the Social Media Draft Law. In the message titled "From the Press Professional Organizations to the Public", it was emphasized that the withdrawal of the draft law for rearrangement was pleasing but insufficient. In the joint statement said, "It is unacceptable to bring the proposal back to the agenda of the Parliament in its current form, which we have been discussing and opposing for days. If a law regulation is to be made regarding the press, it should be prepared together with the professional organizations of the press, without repeating the same mistake" (TGC, 30.06.2022).

In the statement of TGC dated 6 July 2022, "From 11 press professional organizations to the public: We reject the morality guard of the Press Advertisement Institution!" title is used. In the statement said that, "We reject the new Principles of Ethics for the Press, which arbitrarily imposes a broad censorship power on the Press Advertisement Agency. The publication of this decision, which is in harmony with and preparation for the provisions of the censorship law, in the Official Gazette despite the withdrawal of the law, is a new manifestation of the "I did it and it's done." mentality. Press Advertisement Institution is preparing to become the RTÜK of all written and digital media. We will not accept this. We are launching legal initiatives against new moral principles that will increase censorship" (TGC, 06.07.2022).

The title of the TGC statement dated 17 August 2022 is "RTÜK should give up its duty to impose fines on behalf of the government". In the statement, it was stated that RTÜK fined Halk TV for the allegations that the evaluations in Medya Mahallesi (Media District) had humiliated President Erdoğan and for the evaluations in the Görkemli Hatıralar (Glorious Memories) Programme. Also, Tele1 TV's Dr. It was stated that Ekrem Karakaya was punished for allegedly not complying with the publication ban regarding the murder in Konya, and www.tele1.com.tr was penalized for allegedly providing financial support over the internet. In the statement, after the Presidency of Religious Affairs' petition, it was stated that Prof. Dr. Celal Şengör was fined for his evaluation of "Musa Prophet" in the Teke Tek (One on One) Program; and Netflix was punished by removing the broadcast from the catalog

due to the animation Jurassic Word Cretaceous Camp. In the comment section of the message, it was stated that “RTÜK continues to embarrass Turkey alongside modern countries with its negative attitude” (TGC, 17.08.2022).

The message of the Association dated August 23, 2022 again targets the Press Advertisement Agency. TGC made a statement titled “We call on BİK to abandon its decision of violation of rights against Evrensel Newspaper” and in this statement, it criticized the Press Advertisement Agency for its attitude towards Evrensel Newspaper and for ending the newspaper's right to publish official announcements and advertisements (TGC, 23.08.2022).

Two days later, the message titled "Press Professional Organizations said no to the unlawful practices of the BİK" was published regarding the joint press conference organized by the press professional organizations on the attitude of the Press Advertisement Agency (TGC, 25.08.2022).

The message titled “‘Censored Life’ meeting held”, published on September 27, 2022, is about the meeting jointly organized by the Journalists Association of Turkey (TGC), the Writers Union of Turkey, the PEN Writers Association and the Turkish Publishers Union. In the meeting, “the censorship brought to news, books, music, theater and cinema, which is an example of the government's intervention in the lifestyle of the citizen” was discussed (TGC, 27.09.2022).

The title of the TGC's message dated 3 October 2022 is "Press Professional Organizations: The government should withdraw the draft law it prepared to aggravate censorship before the election". Representatives of the Journalists' Association of Turkey, Journalists' Union of Turkey, Writers' Union of Turkey, DİSK Press Business, Press Council, PEN Writers' Association, Turkish Publishers' Association held a meeting in Istanbul and demanded the withdrawal of the Social Media Draft Law, which is expected to be submitted to the Turkish Grand National Assembly the next day (TGC, 03.10.2022).

The addressee of the TGC message dated 7 October 2022 is also RTÜK. In the message with the headline “RTÜK continues to hand out fines on behalf of the government on the way to the elections”, it was stated that Halk TV, Tele 1, KRT and Kafa Radio were fined by 3 percent by the majority of the votes. “RTÜK cited the discussion of the allegations of organized crime organization leader Sedat Peker on television and the "humiliation" of Serhat Albayrak and Zehra Taşkesenlioğlu as reasons for these decisions. Kafa Radio was fined 3 percent for criticizing the words of former Parliament Speaker İsmail Kahraman who said,

“We did not fire a single bullet in the liberation of İzmir.” expression was used (TGC, 07.10.2022).

TGC's message dated October 14, 2022 bears the headline "Censorship law will prevent citizens from accessing the news". The Association reacted to the adoption of the Social Media Law by the Turkish Grand National Assembly:

“Although the government controls 90 percent of the media, it has not been able to prevent journalists from doing their duty as they wish.

With the enactment of the Press Law, known as the Censorship Law in the public, and the Law on Amending Certain Laws, there will be more negative changes than the current situation in the field of freedom of expression of the press and thought. Data on epidemics affecting public health such as Covid, announced by health professional organizations, inflation rates announced by economists, mining accidents, environmental pollution that may be caused by companies, or the concealment of the statements of criminal organization leaders by the government and changing them will be defined as misleading the public. The independence of the judiciary is a serious problem in our country. The right of journalists and citizens to a fair trial is constantly denied. The Anti-Disinformation Unit was established without passing this law in the Parliament. Any news that does not support the work of the government will be defined by this unit as misleading the public. It will be facilitated by the courts to impose prison sentences of up to three years on both journalists and citizens who share the news.” (TGC, 14.10.2022)

The TGC message dated October 20, 2022 is also about RTÜK and bears the headline "TGC's reaction to the penalty given to Tele1 TV: RTÜK should stop blocking the citizens' right to access information". Noting that the penalty imposed by RTÜK on Tele1 TV was an intimidation against critical journalism, the Association expressed the following views:

“RTÜK decided by majority of votes that Tele1 TV would be shut down for three days on the allegation that it 'broadcasts based on language, religion and race discrimination' in clause 8/1/b of the law numbered 6112, and repeated this twice in a year. The next stage will be the termination of the channel's broadcasting life. The decisions of RTÜK, which continues to impose heavy penalties with the aim of blacking out the screen while going to the elections, are a direct intervention in the journalism profession and are against the Constitution. Sanctions are disproportionate. It aims to discourage discussion of public issues. It leads to censorship and self-censorship. RTÜK should work in accordance with the founding law, keep an equal distance from all media outlets, respect the Constitution, the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression.” (TGC, 20.10.2022)

5. Findings

When the messages of TGC are analyzed, it is seen that the most important agenda item is freedom of the press.

Two main issues stand out in the 27 messages examined between January 1 and November 1, 2022: 14 of the messages are related to the Social Media Draft Law prepared by the

government and 9 of them are related to the bans of the RTÜK. 4 messages were also published on other subjects, three of which were related to the Press Advertisement Institution.

Table 2. Content of messages about freedom of the press

Messages about the Social Media Draft Law	Messages about RTÜK	Messages on other topics
14	9	4

The research questions are answered as follows:

- a) TGC has included the issue of freedom of the press to a large extent in the messages it has published, and has considered this issue as its top priority.
- b) Although TGC is a professional organization, it took political risks and criticized the government in its messages about the problems faced by the media.
- c) TGC has put forward an alternative regarding freedom of press in messages. Especially on the Social Media Draft Law, which contains the most messages in the period covered by the research, "If a law regulation is to be made regarding the press, it should be prepared together with the professional organizations of the press, without repeating the same mistake." was said. RTÜK is also frequently invited to respect the Constitution, the freedom of expression of the press and thought, and to act impartially in its decisions.

6. Conclusion

When the content and discourse analysis of the press releases/messages made in the first 10 months of 2022 by the Turkish Journalists' Association, Turkey's largest and most influential media professional organization the DNA of the media in Turkey is revealed to a large extent. At that time, the most emphasized topic by the Association on freedom of the press is the "Social Media Law" brought by the government. The second important topic is RTÜK penalties and bans. Both of these titles essentially cover the limitations on freedom of the press.

Although TGC is a professional organization, it is not content with just defending the personal rights of its members; has reacted to the restrictions, threats, bans and penalties surrounding the media.

TGC keeps a distance from street actions and protests that are carried out in order to stand up to the pressures of the media; this is the only point that can be criticized. However, the suspension of such demonstrations and the prevention of such demonstrations by the Governorships after the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 can be considered a reasonable justification for the Association.

On the other hand, the extent to which the Association is effective in the public through its statements and messages is another issue that needs to be investigated. It is obvious that non-governmental organizations -if this is a media professional organization- will not be sufficient with their press releases, reports and lobbying activities alone. The active participation of journalists who are members of this process and their joint ownership of the problems of the media will contribute to the opening of democratic channels.

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