

# Stifling the Media: Barriers to Press Freedom

## Yavuz Baydar

Columnist, *Today's Zaman*; Co-Founder, P24, Platform for Independent Journalism;  
Recipient, Special Award of the European Press Prize

## James Deane

Director of Policy and Learning, BBC Media Action

## Kirsty Hughes

Writer, Chief Executive, Index on Censorship (2012-14)

## Chair: John Lloyd

Contributing Editor, *Financial Times*; Director of Journalism, Reuters Institute for the  
Study of Journalism

20 May 2014

The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the speaker(s) and participants do not necessarily reflect the view of Chatham House, its staff, associates or Council. Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to any government or to any political body. It does not take institutional positions on policy issues. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the author(s)/ speaker(s) and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions. The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery.

10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE T +44 (0)20 7957 5700 F +44 (0)20 7957 5710  
[www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org)

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen Chairman: Stuart Popham QC Director: Dr Robin Niblett Charity Registration Number: 208223

### John Lloyd

Welcome to this session on Stifling the Media: Barriers to Press Freedom. We're lucky tonight to have with us, just on my immediate right, Yavuz Baydar, who was a columnist for, and also an ombudsman on one of the big Turkish papers, who was fired some time ago, about a year ago for a column he wrote. Since then, he's been very active in creating a new platform for media and has written widely, both in the *Guardian* here and in other papers elsewhere about democracy and the media in Turkey about which at the moment he's a considerable pessimist.

On my left is James Deane, who created and ran the Panos network, but now is head of BBC Media Action. He's head of policy and learning at BBC Media Action. BBC Media Action isn't actually funded by the BBC, but it exists to assist journalism and media everywhere, especially in developing states. On the far right is Kirsty Hughes, who until very recently, until last month, was head of Index on Censorship.

I should make a few announcements first. This is on the record, not Chatham House rules. Since this isn't Turkey, you can tweet whatever you wish, and unless the speaker says that he or she doesn't want to be quoted, then you may quote. We'll have them speak for about half an hour, about 10 minutes or so each. I'll try to keep them to that, and then we will open out to you to ask questions and to talk about what your views on media freedom, both in Turkey and elsewhere are.

I'm going to start with Yavuz. Over to you.

### Yavuz Baydar

Thank you. Welcome, all. We have been noting, as all of you have been noting, a dramatic decline in media freedom, press freedom in Turkey in the past 24 months perhaps to speak roughly. If you go back to 2011, 2012, particularly after the latest general elections in 2011, June, we have been noting this systematic consistent decline of those freedoms.

Before that, there has been a period of hope during the ruling Justice and Development Party, AKP Party, which by way of EU accession process enhanced freedoms, the debate, public debate was much more free in terms of breaking the taboos. Some form of reconciliation process had started and Kurdish issue, Armenian issue, several other issues were brought to the surface. People who until then were afraid to speak out or to share ideas to debate those issues lost their fear and joined the debate.

That was a period, also media professionals were very hopeful, optimistic about changes to come, particularly about reforming the TRT, the Cold War structured state broadcast into a public broadcaster and also changing the structures of media ownership and concentration so that there would be fair competition, transparency and also editorial independence as never seen before.

But those dreams are now gone or suspended for the time being. We have seen a lot of reporting on jailed journalists. We have seen deterioration of what I call the main bulk of the Turkish media since Gezi Park protests, and we have also seen lately bans and restrictions on the virtual domain.

### 3 Stifling the Media: Barriers to Press Freedom

---

If you look at the... Let's take four steps, four dimensions. We usually, as media monitors, look at the four criteria when we analyse the situation of the media in any country. This is safety, second is diversity/ plurality, third is freedom and fourth is independence. Regarding diversity/ pluralism, Turkish media doesn't seem to offer any problematic views. We have one of the largest media sectors in Europe, with about \$500 billion in ad revenues annually. Print losing, digital winning, and audio-visual very strong, and with about 250 private TV channels, more than 1,300 private radio stations all across the country, about 2,000 local newspapers. Also we have about 51 per cent national internet penetration, with 70 plus per cent in greater urban areas and widespread social media usage.

I should also add the ridiculous element of Turkey leading the top league of the world with more than 19 24/7 news channels. It's ridiculous. It's absurd, because it is not sustainable. The only country comparable to Turkey in those terms is Albania, and this is sort of mindless competition in that area.

So diversity/ pluralism, which is now being more and more used as a counter-argument by government and pro-government pundits does seem to cut it, but it does not because more and more in the past 24 months, we have seen commercial media acting as a univocal orchestra, if you will, saying the same things. If you zip through the television channels, news programmes, you always see the same people, same stories, same kind of narrowed down scope of coverage and also self censorship widespread and heavily on a daily basis used.

Regarding safety of journalism, journalists rather, we have not been noting dramatic declines, apart from the fact that during Gezi Park protests, since aftermath, some people were harassed, some professionals, some cameras being taken away, some arrested, etc. But no more than the average, comparable to the other countries. Problems remain in two remaining criteria: freedom and independence.

Freedom meaning restrictions by law and implementation thereof had been so dramatic as of two to three years ago that we had reached the peak of 90 some people jailed, most of whom are Kurds or leftists in partisan press. That number is now systematically declining. More and more people are being released from jail. Lately, as noted by committee to protect journalists in December 2013, the number was 40. But since December, more and more people in groups were released.

Now according to CPJ's latest posted notice on their website, it says 16. That figure is sort of contradicted by Reporters Sans Frontieres cooperative in Turkey, cooperation partner in Turkey, BIA which says it is between 20 and 25. This decline is explained by the fact that the government intends to continue the Kurdish peace process. Therefore, more and more these journalists, publishers, editors, activists/ journalists are being released.

On the contrary, the independence criteria seems to be the intensely worsening part of Turkish media. As we have seen in Gezi Park... Let me take it from the beginning. After the general elections in 2011 with the violent campaign of PKK led to a meeting in Ankara, PM calling editors and proprietors of media in the autumn of 2011, and more or less discussing with them and ordering them, checking their pulses to impose censorship, self-

editorial council, which proprietors willingly joined and they even proposed themselves that there would be some sort of censorship council to block the news.

This was proved to be very successful when 34 Kurdish villagers were bombed to death by Turkish fighter jets later that year, just the turn of that year. There was a complete blackout of news in the national media for more than 17 hours. We could only find out about what happened through social media. Then the situation continued to deteriorate because PM and government had passed the test, if you will, to kneel down the conventional main bulk of the media by way of willing voluntary proprietors who could control more and more the newsrooms. This led to a dramatic development when Gezi Park protests started a year ago.

At that time, as you know, Penguin documentaries, etc., showed the elite public of Turkey apart from the others, elite public of Turkey had until then ignored the censorship regarding Kurds, etc., suddenly realized that their kids, the stories about their kids, dramatic developments were also censored by the national main bulk of the media. That led to protests. That led to somehow an awakening, a realization that there was something really rotten about the Turkish media.

This was of course linked with the fact that for years and years, the media proprietors who had entered the media from other businesses like telecommunications, tourism, etc., with having no idea whatsoever about what journalism is about, what its social role is about, started chasing away the entire trade union activity and membership from their outlets. Second, appointing systematically people who would only say yes to their daily interventions on editorial decisions, and continued to seek favours from the government by way of public procurement, public tenders, public contracts, which was obviously wonderful felicity wheel, if you will. This led to constantly refreshed unholy alliances between the governments and media providers.

So this was the system, and that system collapsed or became visible. I would not say collapsed, but became visible during Gezi Park protests. Now we have also seen the new pattern that jailings, which called the world's attention, became more and more replaced by firings and sackings of media professionals who wanted to defend the integrity and ethics of journalism. Since June last year, more than 250 professionals were fired. Firings have been replaced as punitive measures in the medias with Turkey being more visible of it all, but in the Middle East as Patrick Cockburn wrote in the *Independent* some months ago, in Arab countries but also in western Balkans.

This is a very serious development that shows that the ownership structures in emerging democracies particularly and also public broadcasting, its importance. Those elements will define the transitional processes because if we have these kind of dirty dealings which pulls media into corruption itself and media proprietors will not be helpful at all for these countries to reach democratic conclusions.

I will speak more about this, but I should end here because I don't want to extend my time.

### John Lloyd

Thank you. That last point I think is one that other speakers may well pick up and might be one for discussion but in emerging countries, where there are powerful proprietors who wish to stay on the right side of the government because of contracts, especially as they've got as I think they do in Turkey, have corporations which are in construction and other areas other than media. They can act as a surrogate for government when the government cracks down. That's a worrying sign that isn't confined to Turkey. Kirsty.

### Kirsty Hughes

Thanks, John and good evening everybody. I think in a sense where Yavuz ended is where I want to begin with some very simple comments about media and democracy, because I think... I mean the title we've been given, 'key challenges to international media freedoms' is a huge one. There are a lot of challenges out there and a lot to say about them, so let me just focus on a few key points.

I think it's a very difficult period for media freedom, and I think if we start with the democracy point, I think media freedom is both vital for democracy, it's a vital component of democracy, it's also a barometer of democracy. If you see something going wrong as you do in Turkey with media freedom, you understand that there are other problems going wrong with Turkish democracy compared to five years ago, for instance.

So it's not surprising that where regimes are not democratic at all like Iran or China, that we find worse censorship and restrictions, I think why I say it's not a difficult period for media freedom is that we also see declining media freedom in too many democracies, whether they may be emerging democracies or established democracies. I think, and this is maybe linked to that fact, we also see less emphasis on media freedom and freedom of speech in democratic countries' foreign policies. So in Western foreign policy, particularly EU and US, obviously that's opening up a huge and wider issue in a way, there's often been more than a degree of hypocrisy in Western pursuit of freedom, democracy, rights in its foreign policy. There are a lot of debates around that.

But I think we're actually in a period where foreign policy – British foreign policy, American foreign policy, the EU's foreign policy – is maybe the weakest in many ways it's been in many years. That's both a broader subject, but I think it's actually part of understanding why media freedom internationally may be more under threat than five to 10 years ago in many ways. I think that foreign policy is both weak; I think it's less strategic and to the extent to which it exists at all still, I think we're in a more kind of realpolitik period and less rights oriented foreign policy period. I think that's true.

We talk about the West, or we're in a multi-polar world now, so that may be not quite the right phrase but I think if we look at India, South Africa, Brazil, there are lots of issues there too around media freedom and around foreign policy.

On top of that, we are of course very much in a digital world these days. That has a whole host of both plusses and minuses, I think, for free speech and media freedom but we know since almost exactly a year ago that we're also in, as part of that digital world, in a world of mass surveillance around the world. It's being undertaken by democracies, the

NSA, GCHQ is part of that foreign and security policy as well as part of their domestic policy.

So let me just say a few more things, firstly about foreign policy, then about – if I have time to squeeze it all in – then about some of the problems with media freedom in established democracies and then a couple more things about the digital world issues and the challenges, plusses and minuses they pose.

Very briefly on the foreign policy, but I think when we look at the US, I heard a senior British diplomat recently say under Chatham House rules that he thought this is the most domestic oriented US administration in decades. I think I tend to agree with that, and I think it's also a US where Obama is quite a national security hawk. He's tending to put interests in security ahead of rights.

We saw three years ago as the Arab Spring got underway, they had a discussion both in Europe and in the US saying, 'We mustn't do this. We mustn't put security separate to values. The two have to go together.' Yet now when we're in such a disappointing – that's not even a strong enough adjective – three years later, we see Egypt revert to a military dictatorship, the Al Jazeera journalist trial will resume on Thursday. We don't see, I don't think, anything like the pressure and condemnation you might expect from Europe and the US on that.

Obviously the absence, in my view, of any effective policy on Syria, you see in the case of the UK a foreign policy where trade is the most important issue. You see, whereas the EU, obviously they've been obsessed with the Euro crisis for the last few years. I don't think that meant it had to give up on foreign policy. It didn't have to deviate so away, for instance, in the case of Turkey from the enlargement process that it had actually had really helpful, positive impact.

But I think perhaps, I mean there are lots of reasons behind those foreign policy points I've made very briefly, but I think there may be, that failure to push as much for media freedom and other rights in recent years is linked to weaknesses at home. The Committee for the Protection of Journalists has already been mentioned, but they did a very interesting report last autumn in 2013 on media freedom in the US and on the US administration. They concluded, 'Barack Obama has pursued the most aggressive war on leaks since the Nixon administration.'

I had one of the lawyers on the Pentagon Papers case said that to me a couple of years ago as well. CPJ conclude, 'That has severely hindered the release of information that could be used to hold the administration to account.' In the UK, we've had the Leveson Inquiry, very controversial. I'm sure there's a mixture of opinions on that in this room, but in my opinion instead of leading to a wide-ranging debate on media standards in the digital age, what instead it did was result in a politicization of the regulation of the press, although obviously we're now in a kind of... Well, it's not even a stalemate even, because the press's own regulator is about to get underway. But the government and opposition parties all said they had to be something different. What they're going to do as a result, who knows.

What we did see earlier this year was the first ever World Association of Newspapers mission to the UK to investigate press freedom in the UK. In the EU, we saw Hungary

among others, start to politicize its state institutions from its central bank to its media regulators. The EU stepped in, in the toughest way I would say, on the central bank rather than on the media regulator. Again, links to the Euro crisis.

So I think we haven't lost media freedom. We're not suddenly not democracies anymore in the UK or EU or US but there are some very worrying trends. If we then add to that the whole set of questions on the digital side, I see a lot of positive things and it links closely, I think, to what's happened in Turkey because it's very interesting to look at social media, look at the attempts to ban Twitter or ban YouTube and how ineffective, fortunately, those often are. But it raises a whole host of other questions about media and media freedom in our world today.

Who is a journalist? Whose laws apply? Who's the publisher and editor? Who holds power to account and how? Who makes the decisions? Is it the NSA, is it Google, is it Facebook? So I think there's an extraordinary set of questions that I just give those as bullet points almost, the impact on what are the challenges to international media freedom today.

I think the two I would particularly highlight for concluding on, on the digital side, are firstly perhaps not surprisingly, the whole massive surveillance revelations that we now live with in the last year. I think the fact that Britain, America and other governments are snooping on everybody all around the world is massively chilling and undermining both to the right to privacy and the right to free speech. I think what we also see getting entangled in that is a very familiar, in some ways, debate about national security versus freedom – press freedom and other freedoms.

The Miranda judgement, Glenn Greenwald's partner, earlier this year in the UK courts was I think a shocking assertion of national security over press freedom and fortunately the right to appeal on that has just been granted. It's a 50 page judgement. I'm not a lawyer, but frankly it's worth reading. It is quite extraordinarily biased judgement, in my view. Also in the last year we've seen the *Guardian* destroy discs of material under the lies of GCHQ.

So I think the surveillance is deeply disturbing, but there's also a raft of digital censorship laws. There are laws in Russia. That may not be so surprising. There are new laws in Turkey. That's worse, but maybe not so surprising if you've been following the politics. You've had in the last week or so the ECJ saying Google can't link to legitimate sites, the right to be forgotten has suddenly been asserted. In the UK and India we've seen the criminalization of events on social media.

I think that's all very disturbing. I think in that sense we are at a crossroads. We're at a crossroads because of mass surveillance. We're at a crossroads because the digital age has now got to a point where governments, democratic and not, are stepping in with too much control and too little thought and there's also an important geopolitical dimension to that.

So how do we solve that? Our reassertion of democratic values, rights and practices at home and in our foreign policies, is the simple answer. How we make that happen politically is a rather bigger question. A bit more complex. Thank you.

## James Lloyd

Thanks, Kirsty. It's been a grim battle so far. James.

## James Deane

I was going to say, I think I'm going to add to the gloom. I should probably just say, I wasn't going to do this, but as you say, I started in this area of supporting media around the world in the mid-1980s. For most of my life, I've been a huge optimist. When we started at Panos, most of the world, by vast proportion of humanity, got their information from one source and that was their governments. Then we had post-1989, we had a mass opening up of public space.

I know this is an audience mostly of younger members of Chatham House, and I'm going to try and persuade you, but just because I'm older and in my 50s, I'm not a natural, jaded, cynical pessimist. I'm actually a natural optimist. But it's very difficult, in my view to be optimistic. As I say, most of my life I've been optimistic. We've had the extraordinary opening up of public space, largely because of liberalization of media around the world. The extraordinary explosion of FM radio stations, satellite television, independent newspapers around the world, throughout the 1990s, early part of this century.

I mean, when you had social media, internet, this massive spread of mobile telephony, by and large the story of access to information and freedom of expression, yes we've had war and terror and many other things, but actually by and large, the overarching arch of a narrative over the last quarter of a century has been, I think, hugely optimistic and positive. The potential of humans to really generate their own destiny because they have access to information which they choose and prove freedom of expression, I think has been actually very encouraging.

But I'm very depressed at the moment. I'm very, very pessimistic. Why? A lot of what we do at BBC Media Action is focused on fragile states, which I think in many ways in this debate are bellwether states. I think for social and political impact, and the implications of clamping down on media freedom and constraints on media freedom are played out in terms of what happens to society, to politics, to development. We see a set of trends across these states. There are the obvious ones which I'm not going to go into because we've had the extraordinary explosion of access to information, increasing ubiquity of mobile telephony. We've see the increasing access to satellite media. We've seen the implications of that around the Arab revolutions and so on. That's obvious.

The second obvious thing is the appropriation of ordinary people by media, the extremely low entry points of media, everyone being able to produce and control and generate their own media through social media. I'm not going to talk about that. Everyone knows about it, people in this room much better than I do. Alongside that, you've had as well as explosion, access to information.

I think one of the things that tends to get slightly marginalized along with the extraordinary excitement and transformation of communication technologies, we've also had at the same time, huge numbers of media organizations around the world. We heard



in Turkey about the number of 24 hour stations. Afghanistan, the spectrum is saturated. In Afghanistan a decade ago, there was no media. Now there's something like 200 FM radio stations. There's not enough spectrum any longer for any more FM stations in the country. We see this in country after country, the number of radio, the number of television, number of satellite televisions, number of newspapers. There is actually a boom in media around the world.

But alongside that – the boom in the number of media – is a fracturing of media. A lot of that media is searching for new markets, so increasingly it's looking for particular niche languages, particular religious audiences, particular political audiences, other fractional audiences. So it's actually a much more fractured media now. Politically in particular, the media is going after particular groupings of society to serve. We see that in many other countries.

We're working in Kenya, which is a really good example. By and large a decade ago most of the media, or all the media in that country was in Swahili and in English. Now with very good effects, but sometimes also some quite worrying effects, has increasingly focused on the vernacular language, on Kalenjin, on Oluluyia, on Kikuyu. So it's going for different language markets. That's not necessarily for political reasons. Originally it's for commercial reasons, to open up new advertising markets. But it's had quite profound political consequences in terms of the way in which Kenya's debates are held now, in terms of it's a much more fractured public debate. I could get to that in the questions if we've got a bit more time.

So you've got explosion in access and appropriation of media, a fragmentation in media, a fracturing of media. But we've also got, and this is where the depressing bit comes on, I think an astonishingly rapid co-option of media. Media is becoming increasingly co-opted by particular forces within society. I felt a decade ago that a lot of the new commercial media was generally working in the public interest.

Now this is astonishingly generalized kind of trends here, but by and large looking across a lot of the countries we were working in there was an explosion in the number of FM radio stations, particularly the radio stations which were getting into all areas, the explosion of the number of television stations, by and large that were contributing to a better public debate. Because they felt they had to serve new audiences and create a reputation among those audiences, they were drivers of independence.

The way in which our research is looking at this, and we've just done this policy briefing which we've done on fragile states, the role of media and communications – please take copies at the end at the back and it means I don't have to take them home. They're quite heavy. But not heavy to read. But looking at a series of case studies, looking at Iraq, looking at Afghanistan, looking at Somalia, looking at Pakistan, other countries in which we're working as well, there's a general trend towards ethnic, political, religious, other factional forces increasingly either buying up their own media, creating a presence within the boardrooms or in the editorial control process within those media, intimidating media either subtly or overtly.

And increasingly what we're seeing is a much more factionalized set of media landscapes, where a combination of market dynamics, political dynamics and to some extent

technology dynamics are coming together to create this fragmented, fractured and now I think increasingly polarized set of media landscapes. That's the final thing I wanted to point to as a sort of final trend... You mentioned this in the context of transition. Well, take Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a really good example of this, where actually nothing was happening, there was no media just over a decade ago. Now there's this extraordinarily plural media. It's not necessarily totally independent, but it is very vibrant, very lively.

A lot of that is quite donor funded but the largest donor in Afghanistan to the media is the US. The second largest donor to the media in Afghanistan is Iran. Where their money is going is largely to warlord media. Warlord media is increasingly beginning, we see this in other countries as well, warlords, factional actors are increasingly creating their media initially with quite low success rates in terms of the level of audience they're getting, but steadily increasing political influence through their control of media. As a result, if you look at what the future of Afghanistan is, which has got to be one of the few big achievements I think in Afghanistan, it has been the way in which the relatively independent media has been created.

What is the future of that country if there isn't a platform for ordinary Afghans to work out their differences through debate and dialogue across the very deep fractures in that society? Where are they going to go to for independent information on which they can trust and rely, which is actually not the information that is simply being spun to them by particular factional actors?

If you look across all these different areas, and I haven't got time to go into all the countries we're looking at, our view at the moment is of a set of media and communication trends where freedom is not just under attack from governments, although that's raring, it's under attack from a set of different actors in society. It's very, very difficult to sustain independent journalism or to be an independent journalist because you've got no support base, because your media, there's very few professional outlets or spaces in which you can pursue your profession. You're under attack, often violent attack from government or other factional forces and you're under much more serious attack by co-option and fractionalization and polarization of media.

### John Lloyd

James, thanks very much. I've got to stop you before we all cut our throats because this has been a really... Depressing is the wrong word. All of our three speakers have pointed to trends which they have followed closely and which we can trust their judgement on. It isn't a pretty picture. Most of you are young. You may be more optimistic. So let's hear that.