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Journalistic Autonomy as a Professional Value and Element of Journalism Culture: The European Perspective

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The current combination of economic recession and info-technological revolution is drastically affecting the working environment of journalists and challenging their autonomy more than ever. This article focuses on how journalists in specific European countries perceive professional autonomy and analyzes the various factors that affect such autonomy. Continuity and discontinuity in journalism cultures are factors that can help us to understand the barriers to media independence and the occupational freedom of journalists. Periods of political and economic instability or crisis can bring about a break down in professional values, the loss of whole journalistic communities, and abrupt changes to journalistic practices, all of which have a detrimental impact on journalistic autonomy. Our analysis leads us to suggest that an integrated media policy should not focus solely on discrete elements observable within media systems and practices (such as ownership structures, public service broadcasting, etc.) but should also support invisible configurations of various attributes and practices (such as aspects of professionalization, ethical considerations, and education) that influence the journalistic culture and enhance the quality of journalism over time.

Keywords: journalism culture, journalistic autonomy, professional ideology of journalism, integrated media policy

For citizens of democratic countries, information has become much more accessible. The rapid development of technologies and changing business models have fundamentally altered the nature of journalism, its practice, and its ethics and how people relate to the media. In the current environment oversaturated with information, the issue of the quality of information becomes increasingly important, as do the role of journalists and the state of affairs of journalism. Given the rapidly changing media environment, policy makers need to reassess the rights and responsibilities of journalists, the boundaries of journalistic freedom, and the protection of journalists' professional autonomy. However, the focus of European media policy has, for many decades, been almost entirely on the regulation of audiovisual

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media. Simultaneously, the role and status of journalists and journalism cultures have developed under various nationally determined societal and cultural conditions and regulations.

A recent attempt at calling regulators' attention to these issues in Europe was made by the High Level Group on Media Freedom and Pluralism (HLG) in January 2013. Chapter 4 of its report *A Free and Pluralistic Media to Sustain European Democracy* focuses on the protection of journalistic freedom, emphasizing that "journalists must be able to work in an environment which allows for free expression and provides the journalist with the assurance that they can work free from pressure, interdictions, harassment, threats or even actual harm" (HLG, 2013, p. 32). This statement is compatible with the notion of journalistic autonomy—the freedom of journalists to define, shape, and control their own work processes and to act on their own judgment, taking responsibility for their independent decisions (McQuail, 2010; Örnebring, 2013; Scholl & Weischenberg, 1999; Singer, 2007). The report also clearly demonstrates the complexity of defining and establishing Europe-wide principles and instruments to support journalistic freedom and autonomy. The HLG (2013) admitted that in "the rapidly changing context of multiple media formats and types of journalists," it is not possible to offer "any firm and consensual definition of either journalism or journalists" (pp. 34–35).

Although various legal and self-regulatory instruments concerning journalism and journalists exist in all countries, definitions are lacking in most European countries. They exist in a few countries with strong professional associations through definition of membership. In other countries (e.g., Slovakia, Italy, and Romania), definitions can be found indirectly in the role of journalists as providers of current news and information to the public, meeting the right of citizens to be informed. Very few countries have legal definitions of journalists and journalism, though Belgium and Croatia do (Cafaggi, Casarosa, & Prosser 2012). The same definitional problem arises directly or indirectly in studies on *citizen journalism*, or *civil journalism*, which focus on assessing the nature and quality of the information such sources provide (cf. Nip 2006; Örnebring, 2013; Wiik, 2009). In this article, we discuss the different qualities of citizen and professional journalism and argue that journalistic autonomy appears to be one of the distinctive indicators of the borderline between citizen journalism and professional journalism.

The lack of a consensual definition of journalism and variations in the degree of professionalism are not the only issues that determine the extent of journalistic autonomy and its protection in various countries. Equally important, but much neglected in media research and policy making, is the significance of the cultural dimension that influences the configurations of various determinants of journalistic autonomy.

The main aim of this article is to demonstrate that the feasibility of various Europe-wide media policy instruments depends not only on the diversity or homogeneity and economic robustness of media markets but also on the nature of particular journalism cultures, their symbiosis with national cultures, their historical development with or without disruptions, and the level of professional education. Using examples from the research reports of the 14 countries that participated in the EU Framework 7

MEDIADEM project,¹ we compare journalists' perceptions of professional autonomy in those countries where the issue of journalistic autonomy as a professional and media political value was most clearly identified (Bulgaria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain). The comparative study on journalistic autonomy in the MEDIADEM countries (Harro-Loit, Lauk, Kuutti & Loit, 2012) revealed that the contexts in which autonomy was a problem differed significantly across Europe. The MEDIADEM country reports² also show that certain factors (e.g., economic factors) that are influential in some countries may be marginal or absent in others. The problems are different for large and diverse media markets with a variety of journalism cultures than for small and homogeneous markets, whose development is closely connected to national cultures and values (George, 2013; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011).

The article further addresses the issue of the development of journalism cultures over time, with specific reference to journalists' individual autonomy. The assumption is that in countries that have experienced a lengthy uninterrupted development of the journalism culture, journalistic autonomy as an occupational value is more deeply rooted in professional ideology and everyday news reporting than in those countries where such development has been disrupted. Disruption also affects education in journalism and communications, how the culture of journalism is influenced by academic media research and critique, and the general importance of journalism in a society. Continuity and discontinuity therefore provide a perspective from which to compare and explain the many differences in journalism cultures that affect journalistic autonomy.

We also suggest that an integrated media policy, as opposed to autonomous policy instruments as means for achieving particular goals, may be necessary if journalism is to advance from a liberal occupation to an established profession in which occupational values, including autonomy, are better protected from external pressures. In countries with consistent journalism cultures, where professional education and critical (self-)reflection (in the forms of media criticism and media literacy) are elements of the culture, media policy should support the factors that advance these elements. In countries with disrupted journalism cultures, either because of a change to the political regime or a generational shift in journalism stemming from the economic crisis, it is important to analyze the factors that suppress journalistic autonomy and undermine journalism's reliability. Finally, we are not aiming at a comprehensive comparison of journalism cultures in Europe, indeed, not in all 14 MEDIADEM countries. Instead, we discuss some comparable aspects concerning journalistic autonomy and suggest the continuity and discontinuity of journalism cultures as parameters that an integrated European media policy could use to its benefit.

Journalists in the Everybody-Can-Become-a-Journalist Era

Autonomy is an important element of the professional culture of journalism that helps to mark the borderline between citizen journalism and professional journalism. The Internet and Web 2.0 have

¹ Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, and the UK (see <http://www.mediadem.eliamep.gr/>).

² All 14 county reports are accessible at the MEDIADEM website, <http://www.mediadem.eliamep.gr/>.

greatly enlarged the number of sources and transmitters of information and opinion beyond professional journalists. Citizen journalists are equipped with similar modern digital devices as professional journalists and are able to contribute to news streams, even by live reporting. The proponents of citizen journalism (a term often used interchangeably with *participatory journalism*, *public journalism*, or *civic journalism*) have argued that especially in the Internet era, citizen journalists can substantially contribute to an informed citizenry (e.g., Bowman & Willis, 2003; Glasser, 2000; Nip, 2006; Rosen 2000). Bloggers as the critical voices from among the citizenry are arguably able to correct and scrutinize mainstream media (Cooper, 2006). The potential of citizen journalism has even been seen as a threat to professional journalism, as nowadays “all citizens can become journalists” (Chang, 2005, p. 930).

Although citizen journalists, in various capacities, complement the information flow from mainstream media, there is not convincing evidence of the sustainability in citizen journalism of critical analysis of information, commitment to ethical principles and other occupational values of journalism, and, especially, any accountability to the audience. Research has demonstrated the inability of citizen journalism to provide the quality information (Franklin, 2008) “needed for collective self-determination” (George, 2013, p. 12). According to a Swedish study, user participation occurs only in certain segments of content creation: “popular culture-oriented content and personal/everyday life-oriented content rather than news/informational content. Direct user involvement in news production is minimal” (Jönsson & Örnebring, 2011, p. 127). Participation in chat rooms and comment boxes appears, for the most part, to give feedback about the content that others have created (Bergström, 2008; Hujanen & Pietikäinen, 2004). However, studies into the competition and symbiosis between professional journalism and citizen journalism have rarely raised the issue of the sustainability of citizen journalism.

It is also becoming increasingly difficult to find essential and trustworthy information in today’s global flows of information and misinformation. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010) put it, in the 21st century, we have arrived from the age of information to the age of affirmation, in which the main question is no longer about how to find information but how to decide what information is believable and trustworthy. This changed situation underscores the growing need to advance people’s ability to critically analyze and evaluate information, which is the task of media literacy. Securing effective democracy requires the existence of knowledgeable and highly skilled media professionals—journalists—who can select, produce, and process reliable information. Their task is to ensure that the information transmitted serves the public interest. There is a clear distinction between trustworthy information and sources and skillful promotion of various commercial interests, or PR production, which nowadays is often masterfully packaged into a journalistic format.

Furthermore, professional journalists have certain resources that citizen journalists and bloggers do not possess. Journalists are part of institutional systems of quality control (i.e., newsroom structures and work routines) and economic structures (i.e., media corporations) and are therefore able to fulfill a steady workflow and ensure commitment to journalistic standards (Jönsson & Örnebring, 2011; Örnebring, 2013; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). Professional journalists are part of an occupational community that possesses a particular symbolic resource—professional ideology. Professional ideals and standards are important in constructing occupational identity, “a sense of belonging and pride,” and in directing the daily work and decisions of journalists (Wiik 2009, p. 354). Principles that are deeply rooted

in the ethos of professional journalism (transmitting authentic information quickly, investigating wrongdoing of those in power, and commitment to public interest) are largely based on journalists' ability to make independent decisions and take control over their daily work—in other words, on their individual occupational autonomy.

The Complexity of Journalistic Autonomy

Autonomy has been valued as an essential factor safeguarding journalistic credibility, as it presumes journalists' independence from external pressures and complete loyalty to the public (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Larson, 1977). Scholl and Weischenberg (1999) distinguish three levels of journalistic professional autonomy: individual, organizational (newsrooms), and media systems' (society) levels. At the individual level, journalists should be free to select information and to cover stories; at the organizational level, newsrooms should be free from commercial and political constraints; at the media systems level, these systems ought to guarantee press freedom and the absence of censorship. In this article, we focus primarily on journalistic autonomy at the individual level.

In today's media environment, journalistic autonomy is challenged in many ways (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007; Singer, 2007). Academic scholarship has mostly viewed these challenges in light of political and economic or commercial constraints (cf. Macnamara, 2010; Schudson, 2010) and, increasingly, in light of the blurred notions of professional journalism and professional journalist in the digital media world (Compton & Benedetti, 2010; Donk & Trappel, 2011; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010). Changing organizational structures and work cultures also present challenges (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011; Mohd, 2011; Singer, 2006; van Weezel, 2009). Whereas academic scholarship considers political and economic pressures to be decisive in limiting journalistic autonomy, journalists regard factors stemming from their immediate environments (newsrooms, news organizations, peers, everyday working routines) or from within the profession (e.g., ethical conventions) to be more important.

The impact of political and economic factors may be less noticeable under the circumstances of routine news work, mostly because their significance is masked by organizational and procedural influences that have a stronger grip on the journalists' everyday practice. (Hanitzsch et al., 2010, p. 17)

At the same time, newsroom practices and professional ideologies are largely determined by the long-term development of particular journalism cultures in each country.

Research has also confirmed that whereas the institution of journalism seeks to exercise autonomy from governmental or other external control, individual journalists actually give up personal autonomy to a significant degree (Christians, Rotzoll, & Fackler, 1991; Merrill, 1992; Sanders, 2003; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991; Singer, 2007). John Merrill, the leading advocate of an existentialistic approach to journalism, cynically declares:

Journalists in the lower echelons are going about their duties not as professionals who deal with their clients directly and independently, but as functionaries who fashion their

work in accordance to supervision and direction by their editors, publishers and news directors. (1989, p. 36)

Furthermore, "even the freelancer . . . must contend with the conventions, pressures and objectives of organizations that purchase the product of his or her pen" (Lambeth, 1992, p. 57). In the context of the current paradigmatic changes to journalism, the issue of journalists' loyalty gains new perspectives. For instance, journalists working outside traditional news media organizations—such as freelancers and entrepreneurial journalists—should critically reflect on their individual autonomy in light of the conditions under which they work and for whom they work. Lambeth (1992) also points out, in relation to professional autonomy, that journalists are not a homogeneous group, although the existence of relatively universal codes of ethics and professional values and standards may generate such an impression. Journalists' personal values and education, combined with the types and values of media organizations for which they work, produce diverse journalistic communities even within a single country. Thus, the various combinations of factors that limit or support journalists' individual autonomy also depend on the media sector (public or private, national or local) and channel for which a journalist works. The staff position in a news organization, the particular field that a journalist covers, and the journalist's personal qualities (education, experience, and individual values, views, and attitudes) also influence individual autonomy. Equally important are historical and cultural circumstances and the course of life (continuous or disrupted) of the general journalism culture in a particular country. No less important is the question of how journalists themselves perceive their individual autonomy and how sensitive they are of its limitations.

Journalists' Perceptions of Professional Autonomy and Reactions to Its Limitations

The value of journalistic autonomy largely depends on whether the concept is meaningful for journalists and to what extent journalists are sensitive to the absence or restraint of autonomy at both the organizational and institutional (society) levels. According to Rest and Narvaes's (1994) four-component model, the members of a professional community must first have "moral sensitivity" concerning their autonomy. Thus, to value their autonomy, individual journalists should be able to sense the absence of autonomy. Second, professionals need "moral judgment" to justify behavior choices. Journalists must consider what type of interference their work can be justified. For example, editing a journalist's text according to agreed editorial principles is generally justified. The third factor relates to the journalist's motivation to adhere to professional values rather than a news organization's (commercial or political) values. The fourth, and equally important, aspect is whether a journalist adheres to, and stands up for, the principle of independence when under external pressure. Thus, in the following, the focus is on journalists' ability to sense the absence of autonomy and notice and evaluate those factors that limit their autonomy and on how journalists react to these factors in practice.

An interesting paradox appears in journalists' perceptions of their individual autonomy. Journalists in Western democracies usually value highly their personal freedom of choice and decision making as elements of professionalism. When explicitly asked about their autonomy, however, journalists most often understand and describe it through comparisons between professionals and amateurs. On the

basis of 63 interviews in six countries,³ Örnebring (2013) states: "Autonomy in the sense conceived of by sociologists of the newsroom is clearly far removed from journalists' everyday understanding of their profession" (p. 46). An Estonian study found that only 3 out of 10 interviewees could describe the concept of journalistic autonomy:

Most of the interviewees could not easily express themselves while speaking about professional autonomy. They admitted to the interviewer that they had not been thinking about these issues before and only while being interviewed had they apprehended some new viewpoints to professionalism. (Harro-Loit & Loit, 2011, p. 37)

Conversely, when the concept was inserted in a question, such as "How free do you feel in choosing the topics you cover?" or "How free are you to determine the angle of your coverage?", journalists reflected in terms of personal independence. Thus, the primary barrier to moral sensitivity appears to be the absence of relevant occupational discourse, either because of insufficient or absent professional education or because of limited opportunities to reflect on occupational issues in the course of their daily work.

The answers to the aforementioned questions presuppose moral judgment about the degree to which the limitations on these freedoms are justified and about whose interference journalists view as acceptable or inevitable and whose interference they view as a threat to their professional autonomy.

Journalists are usually most sensitive to and critical of attempts to exert political pressure. In countries with high political parallelism (Greece, Italy, Spain), which Hallin and Mancini (2004) characterize as "Polarized Pluralist" countries, the influence of political parties and politicians on the media is palpable, and public broadcasting is under government control. In Italy, some newspapers effectively act as pseudo political parties. The major investors in the media industry are mostly entrepreneurs in other production fields and even members of political parties or of the government (Casarosa & Brogi, 2011). In Greece since the 1990s, a substantial number of journalists cultivated personal relations with political parties, members of the government, and the economic elite. According to Psychogiopoulou, Anagnostou, and Kandyla (2011), many Greek newspapers (predominantly local ones) make losses but are still maintained financially by their owners to support their political ambitions, having established them to serve as platforms for this purpose. For years, public sector advertising has breathed life into a number of newspapers that would not have survived in the market in return for newspaper coverage of news and issues in ways favorable to the government. Systematic instrumentalization of the media by broadcasters and publishers, corporate economic interests, and the political class restricts journalists' independence and distorts the professional commitment to provide responsible and objective news information.

In contrast, in countries with a high levels of journalistic professionalism and low levels of political parallelism, such as Finland, Denmark, and Belgium, which Hallin and Mancini (2004) label "Democratic Corporatist" countries, the relationships between politicians and journalists are rather implicit and linked to certain interest groups. For example, the Belgian media do not openly support specific

³ The countries included were the UK, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Poland, and Estonia.

politicians or political parties, but politicians still show some reluctance to implement media policies that conflict with the interests of specific media groups (e.g., RTL, the Luxembourg-based main commercial broadcaster for French-speaking Belgium has not been forced to comply with Belgian audiovisual media regulations; Van Besien, 2011).

Journalists also experience and recognize pressures stemming from economic circumstances in their everyday work within news organizations. Economic influences seem to be more indirect systemic factors than direct factors affecting individuals, as a study on professional autonomy in 18 countries demonstrates (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013).

Although journalists generally assess their freedom of decision making to be satisfactory or good, they also accept a certain amount of interference by default. First, this arises through editing practices, which may be seen as strategic calculations established by in-house guidelines. Value conflicts may occur on the line between editing and commercial pressures. Advertising is a major economic factor in newspaper production, and pressure from the advertising department can threaten journalists' autonomy. However, according to Reich and Hanitzsch (2013), "most journalists may usually not feel directly affected by advertising-related decisions" and "advertisement-induced factors may in practice appear as organizational and procedural influences" (p. 151). Journalists may even consider cooperation with the advertising department to be inevitable under certain circumstances, which may also indicate a blurring of the border between journalism and marketing (Baerug & Harro-Loit, 2012; Harro-Loit & Saks, 2006). But journalists may still recognize a conflict between journalistic autonomy and commercial interests as a consequence advertising-related factors, as an Estonian example illustrates:

Once I wrote a critical story about a dental clinic and the newspaper lost the advertiser. Then the head of the advertising department came to tell me that look, what did you do, you should apologize to the client. (Niinepuu, 2012, Appendix 1)

Insecurity in the job market can prevent journalists from valuing and standing up for their individual autonomy. Keeping a job may be more important than autonomy when economic conditions are unstable. According to a 2010 survey of the Finnish Journalists' Union, 53% of 600 respondents feared losing their jobs (Kuutti, Lauk, & Lindgren, 2011). In Bulgaria, where there are twice as many journalists as vacancies in the job market, loyalty to media owners is practically inevitable. According to a Bulgarian report, "if a journalist is unwilling to follow the line of her media owners, she is easily substitutable—enough are waiting for her job and will willingly serve their new employer" (Smilova, Smilov, & Ganey, 2011, p. 37).

Another phenomenon that negatively influences journalists' motivation to stand up for their autonomy is described in a Greek report (Psychogiopoulou et al., 2011). Many Greek journalists have sought to secure positions in the public sector, either in broadcasting or in the press office of a public administration unit, alongside work in the private sector because the public sector pays for social security contributions, benefits that private sector media employers often refuse to pay. Thus, journalists often hold two jobs with conflicting functions (e.g., as a reporter in a private newspaper and as a press officer in a state or public institution). A journalist tasked with promoting the interests of a public or private body

through the media cannot be expected to engage in impartial and unbiased news coverage (Psychogiopoulou et al., 2011). Similarly, in Slovakia, many journalists in regional and local media work in combined roles, for example, as editor and as advertising manager or reporter (Skolkay, Hong, & Kutas, 2011, p. 52).

The ability to withstand pressures that limit individual autonomy is often put to the test in connection with copyright. Media organizations tend not to recognize journalists as independent authors and deny their authorship of stories. The situation is articulated, for example, in a Croatian report:

A theft of texts by other authors is almost common, particularly by the "strong media companies that just plunder portals and smaller, specialized media." Some media companies (such as Europa Press Holding) deny authors' rights to journalists who already have an employment contract. The new media and social media are seen as an area enabling the cognitive processing of information and individual autonomy of journalists. Writing for different portals is often a way of exercising freedom of speech and information. (Svob-Dokić, Bilić, & Perusko, 2011, p. 34)

The issue of sensibility to, and critical reflection on, professional autonomy in journalism is connected to the values that the diverse media organizations and professional educational institutions interpret in diverse ways. Private media organizations do value trustworthiness, but for them, the trust of the advertisers comes first, with audiences primarily seen as consumers to whom content is sold. Public service media and most educational institutions are committed to the public interest and treat the target audience as citizens. For them, reliability and accuracy of information are therefore priority values. Journalists' sensitivity to the limits of their independent decision making and the ways they perceive and interpret their professional autonomy depend on the type of professional education they receive and on the existence of a reflective and critical journalism culture in a country. Where such culture does not exist or is very weak and the majority of journalists are trained in (private) media organizations, journalists more easily take the values of these organizations as the norm. In countries with long traditions of press freedom and of professional journalism and education, such as Finland, Denmark, and Belgium, journalists with academic degrees and longer work experience are more conscious of occupational values. They are able to reflect more critically on situations where their autonomy is endangered and are better at withstanding external pressures (see Helles, Søndergaard, & Toft, 2011; Kuutti et al., 2011; Van Besien, 2011). In countries where journalism culture and education are limited, as in Slovakia and Romania, autonomy may not be regarded as important at all (Ghinea & Avadani, 2011; Skolkay et al., 2011).

Continuity and Discontinuity of Journalism Cultures Affecting Professional Autonomy

The collapse and alternation of political regimes, wars, and societal and economic crises all have significant impacts on the life course of journalism cultures. More often than not, they lead to serious ruptures in the development of journalism cultures, the introduction of censorship, the destruction of traditions and professional experience, a reconsideration of basic values, a shift in genres and styles, and

even a change of alphabet.⁴ During political and societal turmoil, a whole generation of journalists may be lost, resulting in generation gaps and deprofessionalization. The development over a long period of time of a culture of journalism and journalistic discourse (continuity of ethical principles, quality of professional education, existence of critical debate on journalism, etc.) definitely affects the extent of journalists' ability to notice and reflect on matters concerning autonomy.

In what follows we thus address journalistic autonomy from the perspective of continuity and discontinuity in journalism cultures and professionalism. Specific elements of a journalism culture may develop continuously in one country yet be subject to severe disruption in another. As noted earlier, political and economic instability and crisis can all lead to such disruption. The duration and extent of any consequent rupture varies depending on the country, and when comparing countries in this way, the importance of taking continuity into account when seeking to understand different journalism cultures becomes apparent.

The Danish and Finnish cases, for example, demonstrate how periods of stable development contribute to the formation of relatively homogeneous journalistic communities and a high sense of professional integrity among journalists. A generally high level of professionalism is a common characteristic of these countries' journalism cultures (Helles et al., 2011; Kuutti et al., 2011). Both countries have enjoyed long periods of press freedom since censorship was abolished in the 19th century. This is also reflected in the continuous publication of their leading newspapers: in Denmark, *Berlingske Tidende* (since 1749), *Jyllands-Posten* (since 1871), and *Politiken* (since 1884), and in Finland, *Aamulehti* (since 1881) and *Helsingin Sanomat* (since 1889).

In both countries, a long tradition of journalism education at college and university levels has supported occupational socialization and the formation of a professional identity. In Finland, journalism education dates back to the mid-1920s and was enhanced by the establishment of a professorship in 1947. In Denmark, the Danish School of Media and Journalism (*Journalisthøjskolen*) has offered high quality professional training since the late 1950s (Helles et al., 2011). In both countries, codes of ethics are acknowledged by journalists, and the press councils have relatively high prestige among the news media (compared with other countries where these exist). Both countries also have strong journalists' associations, whose authority to represent their interests is widely recognized.

Examples of journalists demonstrating high integrity and autonomy can be found in the Danish press. The most famous is the 1999 case of *Berlingske Tidende*, which published a story suggesting that the father of one of its major shareholders, Mærsk McKinney Møller, had been involved in trading arms and ammunition with the occupying German forces during World War II. Prior to publication of the story, the then editor in chief of the newspaper, Peter Wivel, had attempted to reject the story, claiming that it was based on rumors. The journalists protested and accused the editor of breaching journalistic principles.

⁴ As a consequence of the failed Polish-Lithuanian uprising against the Russian Empire, the Russian authorities enforced the printing of the Lithuanian language in the Cyrillic instead of the Latin script. This change of alphabet stopped the Lithuanian-language periodical press in Lithuania (Hoyer, Lauk, & Vihalemm, 1993).

Their pressure subsequently led the newspaper to publish the story (Minke, 2008; see also Helles et al., 2011).

By contrast, the journalism culture of Estonia has experienced several ruptures and drawbacks in the past hundred years. Since its emergence in 1766, the Estonian press has enjoyed full freedom of expression only between 1920 and 1934, during Estonia's first period of independence (1918–1940), and from 1990 onwards, after the official abolition of Soviet censorship. Journalism in the Estonian language had, by the end of the 19th century, become an important component of national culture and national identity; even World War I and the War of Independence in 1918–1920 did not disrupt its continuity (Harro, 2000; Lauk, 2000). The Soviet annexation and occupation in 1940 brought about the complete destruction of free journalism in Estonia. The Estonian press was eradicated and replaced by strictly censored Soviet propaganda journalism. Journalists were arrested and deported in 1941; several were shot, and many lost their lives during World War II. In the postwar years, fewer than 20 of about 700 prewar journalists worked in the Soviet press. Consequently, with the whole corps of journalists destroyed, there was no one to secure the continuity of old traditions. In the course of the Sovietization of the press after World War II, new people without journalistic experience but loyal to the new regime were employed. This rupture erased the ideals, professional experience, and knowledge of the prewar generation. Journalism in Soviet Estonia was entirely politicized and ideologized, albeit to a lesser extent in the small niche of cultural journalism.

Nonetheless, during the Soviet occupation, one particular factor helped keep the memory of democratic journalism alive. Paradoxically, this was journalism education. Established in 1954 at Tartu University, taught in the Estonian language and integrated into the Department of Estonian Language and Literature, the journalism program largely carried the spirit of national culture and even a certain "silent opposition" (Lauk, 2009). This spirit was further carried into the editorial offices. The majority of journalists developed a double professional identity: simultaneously producing ideological texts and creating a more human discourse that people could trust.

A rupture of professional experience and values occurred once again in the early 1990s in connection with the generational shift and abolition of Soviet censorship. The early 1990s saw the withdrawal of the old guard of journalists. By 1995, 40% of journalists were under 30 years old, and 50% had less than five years of working experience (Lauk, 1996). Journalists were suddenly free in their choices but lacked a value-based occupational ideology that would guide them (Lauk & Hoyer, 2008).

The combination of the current economic recession and the digital revolution in the newsroom has also profoundly affected journalistic expertise and occupational values. Media organizations cut expenses by reducing the number of journalists on staff, whereas in converging newsrooms, the workload of those employed substantially increased. Older journalists with long experience and a high work ethos have found it difficult to adjust their expertise to newsrooms undergoing constant technological change. The speed of the work is increasingly demanding, and older journalists are more often hit by burnout than their younger colleagues. Employment policies in many countries also force older journalists to leave before the retirement age. Opportunities to compete with the young workforce in the job market are limited because young and inexperienced journalists are prepared to work for lower salaries and under

less secure employment conditions. Economic pressures have seriously affected the age and experience of the journalistic communities in, for example, Romania, Bulgaria, and Spain. In Romania,

there are a number of good, experienced journalists unemployed or who chose to go freelance rather than work in these conditions. As the media seems to prefer to work with temp juniors (for their low salaries and low expectations in terms of work conditions, including editorial freedom), the employment future of such valuable journalists seems uncertain and their return to the media—questionable. (Ghinea & Avadani, 2011, p. 42)

In Spain,

many professionals (trained by “old” journalism schools) are unable to do their job as they know it (with time for analysis and research) and, at the same time, that they cannot pass their skills on to young professionals—precisely those who lack experience (de la Sierra & Mantini, 2011, p. 41)

Yielding to economic pressures by making older journalists redundant means that valuable resources and skills are lost and the professional ideals and values that help withstand commercial pressures and maintain individual autonomy are no longer part of the newsroom atmosphere. If the critical mass of professionals who value independence and are able to endure economic pressures disappears or does not reproduce itself, deprofessionalization is an inevitable consequence.

Academic journalism education, operating in a constructive symbiosis with practical journalism, can help to form an occupational identity. This can secure the continuity of professional values of integrity and autonomy, especially where a professional association able to secure such values is weak or missing (e.g., in Slovakia and Estonia). Mere hands-on training and occupational socialization in the newsrooms tends to produce journalists whose loyalties lie with their occupational communities, media organizations, or media owners rather than with professional values and the public they serve (Lowery & Becker, 2001). Daily news reporting under constant time pressure does not offer journalists many opportunities to analyze whether their actions and work correlate to what they regard as good journalism. As a consequence, many compromises are made without anyone even noticing the deviation.

Conclusions

Research shows that the current combination of economic recession and info-technological revolution, both of which drastically affect the working environment of journalists, is posing unprecedented challenges to journalistic autonomy (see Deuze, 2005; Gans, 2003; Mellado & Humanes, 2012; Singer, 2007). What, then, are the factors and activities that can resist these destructive forces and advance journalistic autonomy, so essential to the quality of democracy?

Our analysis leads us to conclude that media policies should not only focus on observable elements of media systems and practices (such as ownership, public service broadcasting, and access to

information) but should also find ways to promote various configurations of those elements of journalism cultures that support the publication of quality information and journalistic content more generally (George, 2013). Journalistic autonomy depends on the moral awareness of the members of the profession and on the ability to reflect critically on everyday practices. It requires moral judgment in cases where professional autonomy is under threat. Strong professional identity and integrity are conducive to strong journalistic autonomy (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008; Shardlow, 2009). The problem is, however, that a large number of actors influence journalists in their work, including politicians, media owners, employers, advertisers, managers, trainers, and educators. In addition, a variety of routines and in-house guidelines exist in news media organizations that impose limits on journalists' independent decision making and define their responsibilities and loyalties. This situation calls for a media policy that takes the many interwoven threads of this complicated canvas into consideration.

An integrated media policy would, for example, support the involvement of practitioners in journalism teaching in colleges and universities to foster occupational socialization. As we have shown, academic professional education can maintain the continuity of a journalism culture. An integrated media policy also presupposes the development of media criticism, including public debates over the conditions of entering and exiting the journalistic job market and other issues relevant for the formation of a strong professional community of journalists. Also, the question of journalists' relations with politicians and advertisers should more frequently be the focus of media criticism. Professional associations should pay more attention to the professional ideology along with employment conditions and salaries. This would advance the transparency of editorial decisions and daily practices.

An important issue concerning such an integrated media policy is whether there exists a critical mass of journalists able to recognize and withstand threats to their individual autonomy during their everyday practice. Here, the skills and knowledge of the older generation of journalists should be seen as a collective resource for the profession. It is equally important to ask: What are the conditions that influence the commitment of journalists, and how do they relate to the reliability of their work and its results? Generally, critical reactions to the media concern only coverage of specific issues in particular articles or broadcasts. However, it is crucially important to analyze publicly the multifaceted circumstances that enable false, dubious, or biased information to be published and to reveal the mechanisms that put pressure on journalists. The journalistic community should be able to raise the value of individual practitioners' freedom of expression above loyalty to peers or news organizations so that no journalist should be condemned for publicly criticizing editorial policy or the activities of a professional association.

All of the aforementioned factors point to the need to advance journalism from a liberal occupation to a profession with clearly defined characteristics and requirements where professional values, including autonomy, are not vulnerable to external pressures.

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