

Safeguarding newsroom autonomy: Tensions between the ideal and the actual

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Abstract

The governing notion of democracy moves on ideals of freedom and self-actualization, on principles of pluralism and access to diverse information. Democracy needs freedom and plurality of opinions. And this need defines the conventional role of the media – the democratic media should act as an alert ‘fourth estate’ that upholds and preserves public dialogues and scrutinizes the uses and abuses of power. As an actor with such a distinctive mission journalism requires autonomy to control the news flow according to its own norms.

While such a notion of journalistic freedom and autonomy is accepted as a normative ideal to be applied (with different versions of contextual adaptations) in the newsrooms, modern-day European media, however, are confronted with novel encounters and even crises. Last decade’s news production has been challenged by a number of progressions which have significantly altered these (normative) ideals of journalistic performance. In most cases, shifts in newsroom thinking are related to technological and managerial factors that (with different implications) influence journalistic professional operations, which have implications on organizational cultures and, consequently, affect newsroom autonomy. Additionally to new technologies and their interactive offers, the capitalist neoliberal ideology and business-inspired thinking appeared to be amongst the strongest drivers of change which, by emphasizing economic issues such as profit and efficiency of news organizations, has dramatically transformed professional news management and news making. The financial crash of 2008, though, has uncovered that much of the rhetoric of the 1980s about market efficiency (which for the last decades accompanied neoliberal dogmas of unfettered markets and the cult of privatization and competition) has essentially failed. Voices about crisis in journalism understood as decrease in normative ideals of journalism, professional standards of newsrooms, established roles of journalists and their autonomy from social institutions and corporate interests became widely heard. Journalists themselves have also realized that their monopoly in news production and distribution paralleled by the rise of user generated content emerged as one of the threats to their independent professional status thus making them sure about coming identity crises.

This chapter discusses the effects and consequences that these shifts in journalistic and organizational thinking have had on journalistic and newsroom autonomy. It opens the discussion by looking at models that have traditionally been used as valid instruments to safeguard autonomy in European newsrooms. By reviewing historical experiences it questions whether and in what ways the profession of journalism could withstand new pressures arising from current political, managerial, technological or socio-cultural imperatives. It also aims to analyze present crises and shifts of journalism in different European countries through a comparative perspective referring to examples from older and younger European democracies.

Keywords: journalism, democracy, autonomy, managerialism, market orientation, professionalism

1. Autonomy as a professional value: Normative approach

In the past two centuries journalism in Europe has lived through several stages demonstrating rises and falls of different versions of authoritarianism (in 18th century France during the Napoleonic regime), totalitarianism (in the 1930s in Nazi Germany), and authoritarian instrumentalism (in the Soviet Union of 1917-1991, and in the communist ruled countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 1945-1991). Still, in spite of the ideological influences and their various deviations, varying traditions of journalism's role and its historically cultivated functions, European journalism has embraced the values of press freedom and free expression and communication as well as its role as an alert 'watchdog', i.e. a functioning 'fourth estate' (Christians et al., 2009). Journalism gradually became an indispensable part of the European concepts of democracy, which together with the principles of public service, social responsibility, public accountability, critical relationships with elites and several others also emphasize informed and fair decision making and journalistic professional solidarity, hence guaranteeing a functioning professional autonomy and freedom (McQuail, 2013). This also puts forward the objective of quality journalism as the core principle of the professional newsroom activity that should be safeguarded by newsroom independence from politics, business goals, public relations, audience demands and pressures, and so forth (Schudson, 1999).

Following the normative line of thinking, journalism (as a profession) should keep to a certain mission; it should follow a set of professional standards that frame its specific roles, functions, missions and values that media professionals should aim at. Professional journalism is indispensable for democracy, whereas a functioning democracy appears to be vital for quality journalism (Trappel & Meier, 2011). Ideals and principles of democracy and journalism are codependent – citizens (and, therefore, democracy) need professional media to help them make informed decisions in crucial times, while democracy is the only political regime which assures and guarantees freedom of expression and safeguards media professionals from censorship. Still, such a normative view and claim of principles sharing is not without problems. If journalism has powers of enhancing the quality of democracy, why then there are any bad – imperfect, dysfunctional and, even, corrupt – democracies? As evidenced in Southern European and Central and Eastern European democracies, corrupt politics is reinforced by corrupt journalism. Hence, among the opening questions inquiring about the media's working conditions and its democratic performance qualities should be the one asking what type of contextual setting (i.e. democracy) is necessary in order for the media to perform its agreed-upon normative functions (MDCEE, 2013).

The broadly understood issue of journalism's autonomy in the European academic discourse was widely discussed by Bourdieu together with the concept of the social 'field'. Bourdieu considers journalism to be a 'weakly autonomous field' (2005: 41) with its autonomy depending on an understanding of powers held in the tension between 'economic' and 'cultural' capital. 'Economic capital' in a journalistic field is closely attached to financial issues, predominantly to those of reach, circulation, advertising revenue and marketing, while 'cultural capital' is linked to the production of original stories, uncovering scandal or dishonesty, or influencing the social and political agenda. These two versions of capitals may sometimes reinforce each other, however, in the modern media industry 'the imperative in mass circulation, popular news media to sell as many copies as possible, or attract as many 'hits' as possible, tends to weaken the cultural in relation to the requirements of the economic' (Phillips et al., 2010: 55).

Taken in a general sense, newsroom autonomy belongs to the core understanding of journalism as an independent social institution of modern democracy. Briefly, newsroom

autonomy means that the process of agenda setting inside the newsroom, as well as the selection of topics, sources, opinions, tone and genre should remain in the hands of the newsroom staff without interference by actors or processes outside of the journalistic framework. In all European democracies autonomy has been safeguarded by various mechanisms, such as (a) the legal provisions for freedom given to media and journalists and legitimated by universally shared approaches to journalism as a public service; (b) by journalists' responsibility and accountability to society; (c) by its compliance with a number of professional standards supported by society and professionals. In the real work of market based media organizations, journalists' autonomy has become an important feature of the professionalization concept, in which the idea of newsroom independence has been embedded. Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini envision media autonomy along with distinct professional norms and public service orientation, hence it is outlined as one of the three core dimensions of journalistic professionalization (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 34). The key reason for this is an attempt to justify a greater control, a feeling of some kind of 'ownership of the artifact produced' that journalists should cultivate over their work process. As argued, the autonomy of a journalist is not necessarily that of an individual, but is to a significant extent collegial, that 'of the corps of journalists taken as a whole' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 35). Still, research has identified many influential obstacles, which prevent journalists from acquiring full control over the outcome of their production. Among those most often mentioned are the following: the nature of the media industry where mass production is the norm; limited number (or an absence) of cases of media ownership by journalists; rare involvement by journalists' in the managerial control of media organizations, as well as others.

It is also obvious that journalists' autonomy may only exist in a society that not only highly values, but also protects media from censorship. In the 20th century, legal measures envisaged in all European countries that adopted freedom of speech (freedom of media) and the inadmissibility of censorship not only in their Constitutions, but also in special legislation on media (Kelly et al., 2008). In addition, a competent self-regulatory process was considered to be the best solution not only to calls for responsibility and accountability of journalism, but also to safeguard professional (journalistic) autonomy. As Denis McQuail puts it:

'Social responsibility' notions are ... subordinate to professional autonomy and a freedom to choose goals and standards without any external interference (McQuail, 2013: 55).

Nevertheless, in spite of various actions, real life, however, is somewhat different. Journalists suffer from various pressures on their professional autonomy in their newsroom routines. Numerous examples can be listed from various European countries indicating that contemporary business strategies and their emphasis on predominantly capitalist and neoliberal values of supply and demand seriously distort the view of what professional and quality journalism should be. As a result of the intensification of business oriented thinking, of governing managerial discourse in most European newsrooms, efficiency and profit have become the biggest matters of organizational concern in contemporary news organizations (Starr, 2012; Wiik & Andersson, 2013). Hence, more and more journalists object to a lack of control over their work: they do not decide on what topic to cover as news or how to cover them; they are also not free to reveal their own opinions that dispute or otherwise challenge the policy of the employing organization (McQuail, 2013). Mark Deuze lists additional conflicts inside newsroom autonomy including conflicts between journalists and marketers, journalists and editors, and the constant need to upgrade journalistic skills (Deuze, 2005).

2. European journalisms and challenges they encounter

With European Union and Council of Europe enlargement in the 1990s, economic and cultural differences inside the European media became even more visible and obvious¹. The growth and availability of systematic scholarly analysis and informed knowledge about the changeability and variations in European journalism – and particularly of Central and Eastern European journalism and their hybrid character and diverse national colorations (Voltmer, 2013; Hallin & Mancini, 2012) – is among the decisive factors in such a shift of attention. In recent years the attention of scholars has once again shifted – this time to the changes broadly considered by researchers as a major re-configuration of established democracies through the transformation of citizenship and decreasing public engagement (Mancini, 2013; Prior, 2013; LeDuc et al., 2010) on the one hand, and the transformation of media economies and professional journalism on the other. Predominantly the latter circumstance has resulted in decline, crisis and even chaos in the media industry (Doctor, 2010; De Prato, Sanz & Simon, 2014; Levy & Nielsen, 2010).

While the principles and values of freedom, diversity and impartiality have been accepted in most European countries as a normative ideal for the news media, their implementation almost from the very early days of modern journalism has been complicated by their contextual conditions and realities, meaning their political cultures and dominating (neoliberal) ideologies. Still, the question of media freedom and independence, of professional journalistic standards and contextual conditions for their implementations including the autonomy of the newsroom remains quite relevant in all European countries. For centuries, politics was an area with strong attempts to violate the autonomy of journalists (although with different degrees of ‘success’). However, as seen from various cases, principles of objective journalism based on a reliance on facts and respect to impartiality have been challenged by advocacy and instrumental political journalism that dominated European news media in the early days and – paradoxically – became widespread in professional newsroom cultures even in those European countries with the oldest traditions of democracy (Weaver & Willnat, 2012) thus making the sovereignty of professional journalists rather vulnerable. The political factor (in synchronization with economic conditions) is even more dangerous in the younger European democracies. It is quite correct to claim that post-communist transformations of the early 1990s in the CEE took place under economically much weaker conditions. Two decades later, still, the economic factor is as strong as it was previously, separating the Western and the Central Eastern parts of the same continent. Hence, the political thinking of elites in those weaker markets is powerfully shaped by attempts to increase political control of economic capital and resources, and by,

¹ In spite of the still dominant voices of the CEE region’s relative homogeneity, a group of scholars emerged who emphasize the importance of looking at CEE transformations as incorporating multilateral – pre-communist, communist, and post-communist – attributes and legacies found in their political cultures (Gross & Jakubowicz, 2012). In succeeding arguments the historical perspective sounds particularly significant, emphasizing that the communist decades in those countries were in many ways as diverse as those of the new democracies turned out to be. The communist-ruled states in Central, Eastern and Southern (Balkan) Europe resembled various ways of life and of self-organization and, quite analogously, today’s Central and Eastern Europe is nothing more nor less than a heterogeneous constituency of political and media cultures where the patterns of today’s politics (dominating discourses, policy choices, regime stability) and economic development correlate with patterns of politics and institutional choices in the region made in the critical times of the past century (Ekiert & Ziblatt, 2013).

subsequently, ‘engaging’ media for such purposes². But the CEE media itself is not without sin either – it is prone to heavy manipulation, populism, sensationalism, and political consumerism (Gross, 2014). In general, all such locally maintained and complex relations between the key elite groups seriously affect the professionalization of CEE journalism, particularly its independence, which is seen through media freedom indicators being much lower in CEE countries if compared to those in Western Europe.

Economic conditions have always been a decisive factor in ensuring successful media operations. However, in the past few decades new criteria and indicators, specifically those of cost efficiency, return on investment, revenue streams for media managers and owners became the most visible markers of the success of media organizations reducing the importance of journalistic professional values and the ways to safeguard them (Wiik & Andersson, 2013). Since the last century alone, as a result of liberalization and privatization, many of the ideals of the previously dominant logic of the social contract were marginalized or entirely disregarded in the policies of Western European democracies as well. In many European states the activities that were previously supervised by the government (such as education or health care) were taken over by the guidance and logic of the market. As Starr (2012) shows when explaining the background to the news media crisis, the primary mistake under such thinking and its submission in the media field was its ignorance of the fact that journalistic product (such as news) is a public good and that public goods tend to be systematically under produced in purely market-driven circumstances.

One of the recent threats considered to lead to newsroom autonomy crisis came from technological developments and the rise of the internet and social networks that have challenged journalistic activity also in terms of newsroom processes and the shifting relationships between journalists, news organizations and their audiences (Pavlik, 2001). Today the activities of new, more open and often amateur journalists differ from traditional professionals’ work in a number of areas including the existence of editorial control, production of news outside the traditional newsrooms, and delivery of the content interactively and at greater speed (Fenton, 2010: 6). Therefore, the challenges that the technological advancements pose on journalism should be considered to be with long term effects and serious consequences, among which the most significant are the reduced news cycles and the increasing pressures on journalists, diversification of sources and thus challenges of offering audiences direct access to news, changing news agendas and shifting control levels on the professional side, lack of resources in media organizations to meet all needs of the new audience, institutionalization of copy-paste journalism, as well as many others.

All things considered, it comes as no surprise that under these developments the concept of the newsroom autonomy as an essential part of the idea of professional journalism has called for new understanding and conceptualization. Can autonomy be an answer to contemporary challenges that European journalisms encounter? Which are the core factors that most strongly influence performance of journalism in different countries?

² For example, in Romania and Hungary, the dominant culture of political and media elites leads to state ‘politization’, defined as the capture of the state by various political powers and interests. In such operations the media is viewed as an instrumental player, an actor which has a mission of skillfully managing public opinion, thus its subsequent occupation and colonization of its logics and operations by political or business interests seem to be an everyday reality vitally important for elites in those countries. In the case of Hungary, for example, the government tends to keep its media under great pressure, whereas in other CEE states (Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia) oligarchs instrumentalize media organizations ensuring positive political coverage which should lead to political and economic gains (Bajomi-Lazar, 2014; Stetka, 2013).

3. Safeguarding autonomy: Historical pathways, traditions and mechanisms

Various models, traditions and instruments have been developed to sustain newsroom autonomy in Europe. Although the efficiency of those measures and initiatives is closely intertwined with cultural conditions and traditions in different countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) some of the measures might be regarded as fit for all media. Among those safeguarding mechanisms found across various countries in Europe are newsroom charters, the trusts (foundations), the shareowner status of journalists, and also newsroom ombudsman positions.

Newsroom charter – or editorial policy documents that secure the newsroom staff – are still widely used in different countries. The content of those documents, however, differs widely; in most cases, variations depend on degree of enforcement towards actors outside of the newsroom³. Newsroom charters that define the relationship between the newsroom and the other partners or policy levels in the media company are more common practice in the countries of Northern Europe. Still, exceptions are found also in Southern European countries (for e.g., at *El Mundo* in Spain and the French magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*). A key element in those charters is the consultation procedure between management and the newsroom to solve conflicts in a strict setting. This type of consultation procedure is well established in Sweden⁴. In Germany the first wave of installation of newsroom charters could be seen in 1969 when different regional and local newspapers worked out a model to secure the independent relationship between media owners and newsrooms. Later other prestigious media with national distribution joined in the seventies (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*); since 1993 the *Tageszeitung* also joined. After several years of consultation between journalists and media owners in the Netherlands a collective contract was agreed upon in 1977 stating that ‘newsroom charters’ were necessary in all media (Model-statuut voor hoofdredactie en redactie, 1977). In Belgium newsroom charters are a relatively new phenomenon with the charter of *Humo*, dating back to 1978, as an exception in the magazine market. The first newspaper (1990) with a newsroom charter in Flanders was the progressive and previously clear left wing title *De Morgen*⁵. All in all, this model is a

³ A good example is provided in the charter of the French newspaper *Libération*. Next to the expressed intention to provide qualitative and fact-checked information on a daily basis, the charter also stresses the branding of the title as free and independent. The ethical guidelines for the journalists limit the possibilities for external pressure. Journalists cannot have side jobs that interfere with their objectivity and independence and the rules go also in very detailed description. It sets out rules for non-acceptance of reimbursement of traveling costs as paid by external actors unless the editor in chief approved of it. Also the individual influence of the journalists themselves is restricted.

⁴ In Swedish news media they refer to the name *samråd* – which is defined as ‘common deliberation’. Although, strictly speaking, this arrangement is not a part of the ‘newsroom charters’ the existence of this mechanism is important. Since 1969 this *samråd*-procedure is elaborated unanimously in the collective employment contracts between editors and newsroom staff for all Swedish media. When conflicts occur, a committee with an equal amount of representatives of both contracting parties assembles to search for a compromise approved by a majority of the representatives. It is formally stated that this procedure cannot be used (misused) to communicate already made decisions to the newsroom. Nevertheless the deliberation system offers no real leverage for the newsroom representatives to defend their autonomy. Moreover, it is possible that editors sideline the *samråd*-procedure for those cases where they consider the economic prosperity of their media threatened (Fischer, Molenveld, Petzke & Wolter, 1975).

⁵ Since the title was taken over by a large media group, De Persgroep, a group with a more liberal ideological branding, it defines the ideological profile of the title while it also stresses the newsroom autonomy. However it did not prevent serious conflicts between newsroom and management and the position of the management

minimal interpretation of the conditions that every contract between media management and newsroom should include. On behalf of autonomy of the newsroom the newsroom charter clarifies the position of the different parties involved – it states who is responsible and for what actions⁶.

Still, in spite of various attempts to secure the working conditions of journalists, histories of (mainly Western European) journalism confirm that there were moments when the newsroom charter did not provide sufficient protection – it failed to prevent further concentration or the dismissal of editors in chief, and it did not guarantee that newsrooms were consulted in the appointment of a new editor in chief (Brakman, 1999). The most recent criticism of charters rests on its instructions for the editor in chief and manager as having a mutual responsibility for the managerial aspects. A shift proposed in the new thinking would be the suggestion that the advertising policy should be excluded from this mutual agreement (and the logic that the news production also has business essentials) to make sure that the editor in chief gives priority to journalistic motivations over commercial goals.

While newsroom charters often are designed to maintain newsroom autonomy in a shorter time perspective, the trusts (foundations) aim at the preservation of the ideological branding of a medium in a longer time perspective. Since 1936 the Scott Trust Ltd. guarantees the English title *The Guardian*⁷. Securing ideological branding was also a priority concern of the founders of the Dutch title *Het Parool*, a newspaper that after being an underground paper during World War II remained in the post war market⁸. Also a different Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* established such a structure⁹. We observe the same strategy to launch trusts to

proved to be the stronger one. Other Belgian examples (*L'Echo*, *De Tijd*, *La Dernière Heure*, *La Libre Belgique*) have worked out some arrangements when the titles were acquired by a larger group, thus trying to secure the ideological and content branding. Also for these examples we observe that it was not a guarantee to sustain autonomy when appointing or dismissing editors in chief. The management proved to be the stronger actor (Vanheerentals, 2006).

⁶ The editor in chief is the one who is responsible and journalists act autonomously while the media owners are obliged to discuss measures that have an impact on the identity of the media brand with the editor in chief. As measures that have an impact are identified: changes in content and lay out, dismissal or appointment of the editor in chief, or plans for cross participation or collaboration with other media. The basic model suggests a procedure to solve conflicts within the newsroom by an elected editorial committee. This committee can act as intermediary between management and editor in chief vs. newsroom staff. And as a third element in the statute there is the obligation to define the newsroom editorial baseline. Since here is a close connection with the identity of the medium the model newsroom charter only offers overall guidelines as respect for the freedom of information and the right to be informed.

⁷ The title first appeared in 1821 and Charles Prestwich Scott, who was editor in chief since 1872 acquired the title as owner in 1907. The New trust explicitly defines its goal and ambitions: ‘to secure the financial and editorial independence of The Guardian in perpetuity as a quality national newspaper without party affiliation; remaining faithful to liberal tradition; as a profit-seeking enterprise managed in an efficient and cost-effective manner’. Up till today the Scott Trust is the beholder of the ideological profile and has the full ownership of the title (Guardian Media Group PLC, 2010).

⁸ The underground experience stressed the importance of autonomy of newsrooms since commercial arguments in many newsrooms converted into publication under German rule. The Stichting Het Parool acquired the ownership although this was degraded over different waves in the concentration of the Dutch market. When the Belgian media group De Persgroep took over different Dutch titles, amongst them *Het Parool* a new foundation (Stiftung) was created, Stichting Het Nieuwe Parool.

⁹ The title originally was founded in 1921 in close relationship with the catholic party and labour union in the Netherlands. In the 60-ies a more independent position is forwarded whilst the stronger relationship with the traditional political actors is broken up. In the concentration wave the title is joined in the same group as *Het Parool* and ideologically makes a left shift. In 1985 *De Volkskrant* strives for more autonomy and some shareholders joint heir shares into Stichting De Volkskrant (Musschoot, 2010).

secure autonomy in the Swedish newspaper market at a moment when the concentration process bundles different titles, previously ideologically secured by some major family shareholders. Some of these trusts control the full ownership of the media involved but there are also examples of different shareholders majority or minority positions, thus providing a very complex ownership structure intertwined with trust-elements (Hadenius, 1993). Finally the French newspaper *Le Monde* also has a trust that is not related to the systems of journalists' shareholders structures¹⁰. The first example of a trust in the Belgian media market is the 'Raad Het Laatste Nieuws', established in 1955 (Prevenier, 2010) and inspired by the model of the Scott Trust¹¹. An alternative interpretation of trusts is to be found in the example of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a right wing conservative quality German newspaper, founded in 1949¹².

Other reliable instruments to safeguard newsroom autonomy are attempts by journalists or journalists associations acquiring shares of their companies, or the creation of newsroom ombudsman positions. Acquiring shares would require a large financial investment and therefore is rare. An interesting example is the French newspaper *Le Monde*¹³. In the German

¹⁰ This trust is related to the readers of the newspapers who in 1985, concerned about the financial troubles their newspaper was facing, raised money to invest in a "société anonyme". Their shares were raised over the years. Today approximately 12.000 readers invested in the SA (Société des lecteurs du Monde, 2012a). Although this vehicle, the Société des lecteurs du Monde is registered on the French stock exchange, there are limitations for the shareholders. Their shareholdership has to be approved of by the board of directors. (Société des lecteurs du Monde, 2012b).

¹¹ Family owners of that liberal title wanted to guarantee the ideological branding and the foundation (Stiftung) had a board of trustees of famous liberal politicians and representatives of liberal civic society. The Stiftung is today still active and invites besides the members of the board also the CEO of the media group De Persgroep and the editor in chief of the newspaper as observers. The former left wing title *De Morgen* (today more progressive brand rather than ideological left) that was bought by *De Persgroep* established a Trust as owner of the brand to safeguard the autonomy in case of new ownership. . This Trust does not have a representative in the Board of Directors of the larger media group and thus has little influence. In the media group Corelio we observe the vzw Redactie, an organization that is open for all journalists. This organization was established in the bankruptcy process of the group in 1976 by journalists. The vzw Redactie is one of the shareholders of the Krantenfonds N.V. that has a place in the Board of directors of the group.

¹² The industrial entrepreneur Haffner, together with some friends amongst who the professor of Economics Erich Welter created an association of investors that moulded into a Fazit-Stiftung in 1959. This Stiftung controls the majority (56,3%) of the shares of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. In the Charter is the remarkable article ordering to use all benefits originating from the newspaper for investment on behalf of public interest. The Publizistikwissenschaft (Media Studies/Communication Sciences) is mentioned as an important field to invest in (Röper, 1997b: 374).

¹³ Due to post war regulation French newspapers that kept appearing after November 1942 were abolished. The post war government was in search of new actors who were willing to invest in media and the technical equipment of the former French title *Le Temps* was acquired by a new investor who launched the title *Le Monde*. One of the leading journalistic names in that epoch was Hubert Beuve-Méry who, after a series of disputes with the management, stepped aside in 1951. This was the starting point for the newsroom staff to protest and to demand the establishment of a "Société des rédacteurs" that would have impact on the nomination of newsroom management staff and the editor in chief more precisely. The idea is realized and the new société des rédacteurs also acquires shares to weight upon the decisions of the management (Fauvet, 1977; Fischer, Molenveld, Petzke & Wolter, 1975). Over the years the société managed to obtain more shares and increasing impact. Today the position of the journalists is strong enough to influence decisions that have impact on the branding of the newspapers and they can have a voice in the decisions that might occur in a concentration scenario. Their power is important since they have a decisive voice in the nomination of the director of the company, a job that combines the responsibilities of editor-in-chief, editor, and member of the board of directors. This combination risks to overpower one person and many conflicts were to be attributed to this unbalanced situation. Although the strong position of the société des rédacteurs has positively contributed to the quality branding of the newspaper, the financial situation has not been boosted. Although the société des

magazine market, the example of *Der Spiegel* is a good illustration of journalistic shareholdership. Founded in 1947 by Rudolf Augstein, journalists and collaborators control half of the shares and also have a return on investment (profit shares) at the end of their career.

Across the CEE countries variations are found of all the above types of instruments that historically have emerged as a product of the process of journalism professionalization in the West. As can be seen in most cases, these were implemented as policy attempts ignoring local contextual conditions (journalistic and organizational practices), thus their outcomes are only of a symbolic significance in terms of professionalization of journalism across the CEE (Harro-Loit et al., 2012).

All in all, these instruments are increasingly under strain through different external and internal mechanisms caused by the most recent developments in the European mediascape.

4. Present challenges to newsroom autonomy

Pressures on journalists' autonomy are recognized by media worldwide and have been traditionally opposed in European newsrooms by various instruments analyzed above. Still, the type and degree of application of these instruments appears to vary greatly across Europe. The opportunities for journalists to make independent decisions differ depending on contextual conditions and on the influences, which in certain cases may acquire the status of central and determining importance in a selected country; these factors may also be assessed as having an external or internal impact and effects (see Figure 1).

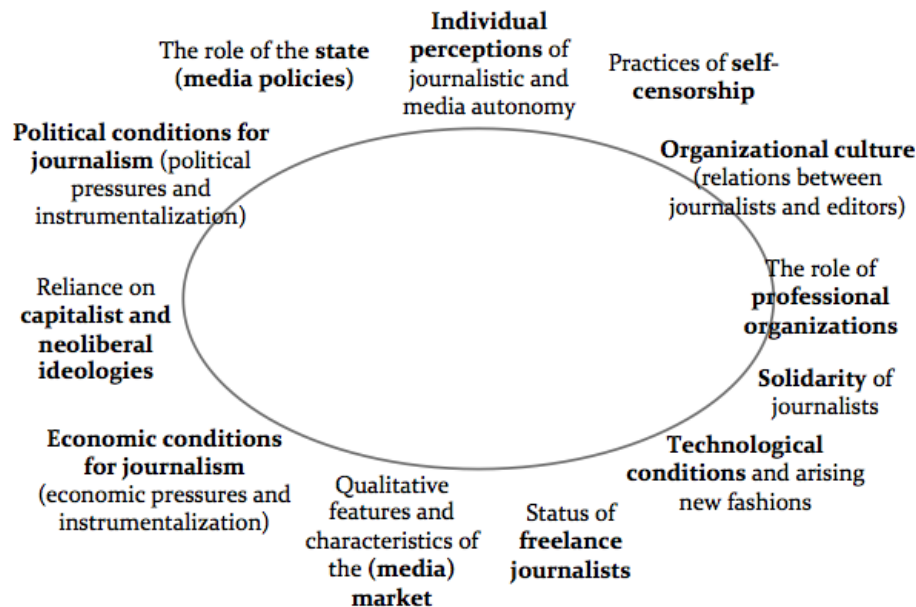


Figure 1. Changeable pressures and influences on newsroom autonomy.

rédacteurs was the major shareholder until 2011, their position was reduced to one third of the shares due to the arrival of new owners (Pierre Bergé, Matthieu Pigasse and Xavier Niel) who invested more than 110 millions of euros, or more than 60 percent of existing shares. This operation was approved of by a large majority of the SRM (Société des rédacteurs du Monde) since specific measures to safeguard journalistic autonomy were guaranteed. Nevertheless this historical shift took away the economic ownership, or the majority of the economic ownership from the journalists.

Generally, the protection of the autonomy of an individual journalist seems to be an all-European problem. It might be defined by:

- The type of media organizations, for instance news vs. entertainment media, press vs. broadcasting, quality vs. popular/sensational media,
- The national media contexts created by different cultural and political traditions (McQuail, 2013).

The debates about constraints on newsroom autonomy have a long tradition. Forces, which influence and restrain journalists' autonomy at their place of work include owners, advertisers, public relations, job routines, social environment, and audience. Recent studies have also identified innovations and more broadly technology as an influential factor in putting pressure on editorial autonomy, although not all of these influences need to be regarded as being negative (Deuze, 2005: 449). Halliki Harro-Loit and Epp Lauk add to this list the position of journalists inside the newsroom, areas of reporting and 'individual sensitivity and ability to understand the concept of autonomy' (Harro-Loit & Lauk, 2012).

Many actors try to influence the newsroom practice from outside (and these pressures should be considered as being external); there exist also many processes situated within the journalistic field (and these might be considered internal pressures). Pressures, which come from the technological developments, might produce multiple effects representing influences both from outside (audiences, amateur journalists, news sources) or from inside (new speed of work routine and news production, obtaining multi-skilling, competition with colleagues).

Major groups of external actors concerned with media coverage are commercial actors who are striving for media attention for their products beyond the borders of the commercial messages and political actors (politics or civic society) whose messages want to sustain or protest a specific policy. Their attempts at influence are often subtle (Gandy, 1982) since journalists are reluctant to use identifiable PR material (Wintour, 1972; Fengler & Russ-Mohl, 2008). As the British journalist Mike Davis argues, the more subtle attempts to direct the media agenda however do have impact and journalists eager to use this type of material (Davies, 2009). The rise of the public relations professionals in recent decades has meant that journalists were faced with a greater volume of information than even before. In a British national newspaper this would account for 50 or 60 emails from PR companies daily. And this is not only the rise in the amount of information that journalists use in the materials that are either initiated by PR or in which PR has been used (Fenton, 2010: 94-95). This is also proven by studies, which show that around forty percent of journalistic articles contain PR material, whereas around 50% of print stories are informed by PR (Lewis et al., 2008: 20). Similar evidence from other national contexts, especially from CEE countries, are numerous (Harro-Loit & Lauk, 2012).

Political actors – parties, politicians, even business actors seeking political influence – also try to influence the media agenda and to get their message in the media content. In many European contexts journalists consider these actors as interesting partners to get scoops or inside information, as well as powerful partners in the news making process. And many scholars pointed to the journalists' dependence of their sources from the political field who might be considered to be major holders of power in the news production process that pressure the news agenda for their own sake.

On the other hand, political instrumentalization of journalism, particularly media instrumentalization in Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Southern European regions in

the context of absence (or failures) of mechanisms to protect newsrooms and journalistic professional independence has become a visible trend (Bajomi-Lazar, 2014). Such features as political clientelism – or state paternalism, as Karol Jakubowicz emphasizes – often reveal themselves in ‘the situation when politics pervades and influences many political systems’ (Jakubowicz, 2007: 304) thus making journalists’ newsroom autonomy quite vulnerable.

External pressures are often considered to come from corporate ownership and marketing departments of media organizations and this reflects the central conflict in the nature of media being simultaneously an institute of democracy and a commercial enterprise. Therefore, media owners and managers approach journalists as dependent in their work on the logic of business. Indeed, the situation in European countries varies. Donsbach and Patterson in their survey of journalists in 1992 revealed that about one third of Italian journalists and less than ten percent of German journalists said that they survived ‘pressures from management’ on ‘the job’ they did (quoted in Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 35). In post-communist countries pressures from owners are described as even more aggressive and threatening, since the professional will of journalists might be bargained by a simple need defined as ‘the wish of journalists’ to eat’ (Harro-Loit & Lauk, 2012).

However, these pressures are not quite obvious everywhere, and, as Humphreys states, ‘there is little evidence of any direct external influences on the UK media, though general commercial pressures adversely influence the quality of news. The main area of potential direct influence is proprietorial guidance relayed via the internal management structure, but the actual extent of this is disputed’ (Humphreys, 2011: 323).

Recent examples of economic crises in newsrooms produced by external economic forces involves financial cuts, journalists laid-down, journalists having to do more with fewer resources, increase in free-lancing, and newsroom mergers and transformation into converging environment (Fenton, 2010: 41). One of the influences of the new media rise over the newsroom recently became the increasing presence on non-professional or ‘citizen’ journalists who are able to disrupt or change professional journalism and autonomy in conditions when readers could have greater impacts on news (ibid, 10, 14).

On the other hand, the internal pressures on journalistic autonomy relate to organizational structures (Lowrey et al., 2011) and organizational cultures, especially traditions and values maintained in the newsrooms and society as a whole (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Deadlines, increasing workload, working in a converged newsroom for multiple distribution platforms, cuts in staff and budgets (Gandy, 1982; Davies, 2009) have a major impact on the autonomy of journalists.

Pressures of sources have a mixed nature, since for many journalists news sources is an external factor linked to either professional news providers (news agencies, other media) or to personal contacts. However, decisions about news selection are often made in work places under strong pressures of time, high speed of news supply and rolling deadlines. Results provided in the Cardiff University research study show that only 12-20 percent of stories were generated by reporters themselves, while the rest were based on external sources. Moreover, it became clear from the research that even when journalists initiated stories themselves, they had no time to use more than one source (Fenton, 2010; Davies 2009).

Gender inequalities still play a role inside European newsrooms, and this is proven by the fact that men are more frequently employed with a permanent contract than woman. New requirements of digital technological skills also creates in stability and pressures for older journalists, especially female ones (Lee-Wright in Fenton, 2010)

Technological impacts include pressures arising from the integrated newsrooms and their impacts on news media production, journalists' professional standards and ethics, and journalistic cultures. New pressures also arise from the new demands for more technologically based skills, for abilities to work in the convergent, multi-platform and multi-channel media environment. This has decreased the role of the permanent newsroom staff compared to more mobile, but less expensive work force of free-lancers. Various studies of journalists in Europe reveal great variations among media professionals: free-lancing appears to be a popular activity among the Western Europeans; still, a relatively large number of journalists in all European countries are employed under temporary contract agreements or other atypical work relations.

As the survey of European journalists has also demonstrated, recent changes in the structure of traditional newsrooms under the pressures of digitalization resulted in its replacement by more cost efficient models that merge in a single news room the editorial activities and the business operations with the new media. Integrated newsrooms which account for more than 40 percent of the total number of European media companies and the diffusion of non-dependent work relations increasingly require the emergence of eclectic job profiles that are found mostly among freelancers. The survey has indicated that in a number of European countries like France, UK and Romania newsrooms are more inclined to heterogeneity than others like Sweden, Poland or Spain. This new eclecticism, in fact, transforms the professional routines in a way that journalists lose their active involvement with the production of independent texts. The interviews with the BBC News web journalists reflected their frustration to act as no more than sub-editors reformatting copy. In some journalists' minds, the new conditions of working with the mass of facts and eyewitness reports 'reduce them to butchers supplying a sausage machine' (Lee-Wright in Fenton, 2010: 81)

5. Conclusion

It still seems that economy is a very strong determinant of a healthy media climate, particularly of its freedom and independence. According to the Freedom House data, in most European countries (with only few exceptions among younger European democracies, such as Hungary) higher GDP scores correlate with higher media freedom and democratization results. But economy, of course, is not the only issue that positively shapes media operations. As argued here, Europe's older democracies have preserved specific conditions for the better functioning of their media. In spite of various financial uncertainties, different Western countries are still portrayed as being (politically and economically) stable contexts. Western democracies are famous for their journalism cultures strongly influenced by the idea of the public sphere as offering a critical forum of debates; they also have established various media policy provisions, for example, by securing financial support mechanisms (subsidies, VAT exemptions, public funding) for their media. And, finally, these countries manifest high degrees of professional solidarity among their journalists which, as revealed through historical experience and practices of charter and foundations design, still appears to be a very helpful (and socially engaging) instrument safeguarding autonomy and, hence, creating a much better professional working conditions than the media currently have in the younger European democracies. In the CEE countries, it seems, journalism is still struggling with specific (cultural and historical) legacies and urgent circumstantial pressures, among which influences from (political and business) elites seem to be most frustrating and threatening. CEE journalism's quality is also fashioned by various socio-cultural particularities, such as self-interest supremacy and stronger expressions of particularism, and, thus, weaker engagement in public matters and weaker public service orientation in those societies. Such

qualities of the general societal culture also strongly influence perceptions of journalists' of their freedom and autonomy and distress the media's (democratic) performance.

All in all, the rise of market inspired imperatives, specifically the ones leading to supremacy of managerial thinking, to business strategies and to reliance on capitalist and neoliberal ideologies, might seriously jeopardize normative ideals, principles and visions of democracy. Promotions of the logic of competition and financialization (that have formed the main dynamic in European economies for the past century) had resulted in various societal shifts. These affected distributions of wealth and, consequently, challenged social well-being conditions across all European countries. Different types of fluctuations and uncertainties were also registered in other social fields, predominantly in the political, where the increasing passivity of the electorate and the anti-democratic behaviors of the European elites were registered. Likewise, a number of dangerous shifts were echoed also in the field of media, suggesting business-like thinking, managerial discourses and effectiveness logic as a governing strategy of its professional everyday operations. When journalistic ideals are being risked, informed and engaged decision-making and thus, democracy, might be endangered, too. Although such a shift in the newsrooms appears to be an all-European issue, its effects and consequences might be especially threatening in the younger European democracies.

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