

Dangers of swimming in turbulent waters

(Girdaplı su, tehlikeli kulaçlar)

If you regard journalism - both at home and abroad - as a risky profession, and if you care about it, you should all be worried by the fact that some of us are demonizing the foreign media in the wake of the events in Gezi Park. Tarring all long-established international media with the same brush and accusing them of conspiring against us will do a lot of harm and, in the long term, will have damaging consequences for our country.

It is natural for all journalists to take an interest in a major event of any kind, regardless of where it takes place and how it comes about. We have professional obligations that transcend national borders. We cannot ignore events that demand our professional attention. We would be failing in our duty if we looked the other way.

Professional ethics are important in journalism but everyone works in their own ways. If freedom of the media exists, one can tackle a story as one wishes. Say, on TV, one journalist can devote five minutes to a story while another can dedicate three hours to it.

Except in communist, fascist and theocratic dictatorships, the media have never had and will never have a uniform and monolithic character in any country.

However, in an overhasty reaction to the events that began in Taksim Square and then spread, some of our media and journalists have turned on the local and international news outlets that displeased them. They have excoriated them and have gone so far as to demonize them.

All this has exacerbated the climate at a time when many reporters have been physically attacked by both demonstrators and police, and when professional cooperation and solidarity should actually have been at its highest. We should not forget that all kinds of journalistic organizations in Turkey work with partner organizations abroad.

As if the street violence were not enough, journalists have also been the targets of verbal attacks.

The publication by *Anatolia Agency*, one of Turkey's oldest news agencies, of a series of photos with provocative captions showing Turkish journalists who string or freelance for foreign media was one of the most disturbing stages, one that should have been avoided. No one has the right to endanger lives and other journalists' livelihoods in these difficult times, and to damage the media's reputation.

And now, constructive criticism for our newspaper, through some self-criticism.

The front page of yesterday's issue of our newspaper responded to the weekly *Der Spiegel*, one of Germany's most serious publications, which described the events in Gezi Park as "an opportunity to pin Turkey down."

Our headline was: "So that's what being a friend is!"

The reason is clear as to why our newspaper published this: it was because *Der Spiegel's* cover photo showed a demonstrator's sign saying "No surrender" [one of the protest movement's widely-used slogans] and because the magazine published ten pages of articles in Turkish.

In our newspaper, it is said that *Der Spiegel*, especially its online version in English, has for years been guilty of editorial mistakes and breaches of professional ethics. I know, for example, it failed with some of its coverage of the crises in Greece and Italy.

Yet, even if this is true, it would have been fairer to criticize without succumbing to emotion, exaggeration and excessive generalization (and perhaps in the form of an comment or an opinion column rather than an article formatted as a news story) and to avoid fuelling polarization.

It is clear that there has been a very serious breakdown in communication and mutual understanding between Turkish and German journalists, and it is vital that we overcome this.

Let us also not forget that when Turkish news media were at first not allowed access to

cover the NSU murder trial [a trial in Germany of a member of a Neo-Nazi group whose alleged murder victims included Turkish shopkeepers], many German media outlets told them: "You may take our place in courtroom."

So let's see the glass as half full as much as half empty.