

# THREATS TO MUTUAL TRUST: CZECH LOCAL POLITICIANS AND LOCAL JOURNALISTS IN THE ERA OF PROFESSIONAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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**ABSTRACT** *The study discusses changes in the relationship between local journalists and local politicians in the Czech Republic as a consequence of the professionalization of political communications at national as well as local levels following the so-called Velvet Revolution of 1989. This phenomenon has been studied widely in Western democracies but is relatively new in the Czech Republic. Politicians' improved communication skills and the employment of communication professionals in politics influence trust – a key component in the relationship – between politicians and journalists. The article is based on semi-structured interviews with 10 journalists and 11 politicians from different Czech localities, which aim to explore how these actors understand and maintain levels of mutual trust. First we describe key components of trust and explain why in the era of professionalized political communication trust is perceived as more threatened than in the 1990s and we conclude by exploring the three most important threats to trust as identified by our interviewees.*

## KEYWORDS

JOURNALIST-POLITICIAN RELATIONS, TRUST, SOURCES, LOCAL POLITICS, PROFESSIONALIZATION, CZECH REPUBLIC

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## INTRODUCTION

Although extensive research on interactions between journalists and politicians and the quality of their relationship has been available, much of the literature focuses on national politics (Davis, 2009; Mancini, 1993; Pfetsch and Voltmer, 2012; Volcic and Erjavec, 2012) with the politician–journalist relationship usually institutionalized or at least based on sophisticated rules which shape the field and favour certain forms of behaviour. In comparison, when it comes to local politics, these rules are less rigid and the quality of the relationship – which can significantly affect political reporting – depends more on actors' personal characteristics and hence mutual trust becomes highly relevant. Local politicians' knowledge of media logic, along with awareness of its inherent normative categories (e.g. objectivity), also raises the issue of trust in the context of desired standards of journalistic work.

Although almost all previous studies mention “trust” as an important element in the politician–journalist relationship, they do not pay significant attention to strategies for constituting and maintaining trust and potential threats to it. The lack of detailed attention to these strategies that characterizes existing studies prompted our research question. Based on semi-structured interviews with 10 journalists and 11 politicians from different municipalities in the Czech Republic, this paper analyses how trust is understood by both groups of actors and which strategies are implemented for its reinforcement. We show that in the Czech Republic there is a strong feeling of nostalgia for the past when journalist–politician relations were less formalized and the professionalization of political communication (Negrine, 2008) was not as advanced as in the mid-2010s. Both groups of actors expressed a desire for fewer strategically planned meetings and more spontaneity, which is in line with some academic critiques of political PR practices that have become an inevitable part of politicians' and journalists' daily routines. The professionalization of political communication – which is inevitably a two-way process influencing politicians as well as journalists – is understood as an ambiguous development by those who actually “live it”.

## JOURNALISTS, POLITICIANS, THE CONCEPT OF TRUST AND POLITICAL PR

Like in every journalist–source relationship, the interplay between journalists and politicians functions on the basis of mutual dependence. While the former control the information flows and are in charge of news selection and framing, the latter hold the information necessary for journalists' work (Sigal, 1973). Putting aside tabloid press practices, the politician–journalist relationship is usually considered to be symbiotic with advantages for both parties, although the actors pursue divergent purposes (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1981: 479). This need for cooperation is aptly emphasized by various “dancing metaphors” (Gans, 1979; Ross, 2010; Strömbäck and Nord, 2006). However, there is no agreement on who leads the “dance” and thus is more powerful in the relationship. On the one hand, sources are considered more influential because of journalists' lack of

time and dependence on editorial routines (Gans, 1979: 116; Manning, 2001: 55). On the other, primacy is attributed to journalists (and media as such) as in Jesper Strömbäck's (2008) fourth phase of mediatization of politics or other studies that critically evaluate media influence on politics (Louw, 2005; Dörner, 2001). Nonetheless, other studies (Reich, 2006; Strömbäck and Nord, 2006) suggest that determining the primacy of journalists or politicians is not so simple and it is important to distinguish between the agenda setting process and the subsequent production of media outputs (in Zvi Reich's (2006) terms between the "discovery phase" and the "gathering phase"). While sources can lead the dance in the process of news gathering, this may not be true about the treatment of content (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006: 149).

The quality of journalist-politician relationships is also influenced by political institutions and political culture (or the polity – see Esser, 2013), as well as by the character of the media system (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, 2012). These features emphasize the degree of journalists' (in)dependence on politicians with some studies arguing that political communication culture has a decisive influence as well; and in some countries routines considered usual in Western Europe have not been developed (Pfetsch and Voltmer, 2012; Volcic and Erjavec, 2012). Some scholars also point out journalists' influence on politicians and political practices, and the reflexive nature of their relationship (Davis, 2002, 2009; Deacon and Golding, 1994).

At the individual level the relationship is affected by actors' personal characteristics. At this point interpersonal trust acts as a prerequisite for a functioning relationship (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1981; Mancini, 1993). Interpersonal trust is usually defined as a feeling of security based on certain expectations of another person's future behaviour (Kassebaum, 2004: 21; see also Burt and Knez, 1995). These expectations are based on previous social experience in addition to subjective evaluations of the other's trustworthiness regarding his/her institution/social group (Berger and Calabrese, 1975; Möllering, 2005). Trust is thus permanently accompanied by a certain level of uncertainty about the future development of a relationship (Luhmann, 1979; Rempel et al., 1985). Trust can also be understood as expressing the character of a relationship or of an attitude. As such, it influences behaviour and feelings (affective dimension) as well as beliefs (cognitive dimension) (Fazio and Olson, 2003: 141).

The professionalization of political communication has become important – particularly recently – in explorations of the relationship between media and politics. It is manifested in the employment of media professionals in political communication and also by the professionalization of politicians' communication as they develop their media skills and literacy (Negrine, 2008). The rise of political public relations has attracted scholarly attention in particular and there appears to be a general academic consensus that practices of political public relations have an influence on the news coverage of politics (Larsson, 2009; Lewis et al., 2008). However, opinions about the extent of this influence differ. As a result of professionalization of politics, contemporary politicians use a wide range of methods to manage their media coverage according to what they consider appropriate. Politicians have a variety of ways for developing elaborate communication

strategies, such as favouring certain journalists (giving the most interesting information only to the most favourite journalists), distribution of press releases, and organization of press conferences or less formal press meetings (Ross, 2010: 280). Nevertheless, these practices linked to the professionalization of political communication are sometimes criticized for their “media salacity” which, according to journalists, can potentially damage mutual trust (Brants et al., 2010).

## LOCAL POLITICS AND LOCAL MEDIA IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Although the journalist–politician relationship shares many characteristics at local<sup>1</sup> and national levels, there are also significant differences. Mats Ekström et al. (2006: 256) explore different forms and conventions of mutual communication which develop under local conditions and are not mirrored at other levels. The relationships between journalists and politicians are much closer in the local context because they meet each other more frequently, often informally, and sometimes they have known each other before taking up their current professional positions. This can lead to quite familiar relationships, which tend to be avoided in national politics because at this level, an overly familiar journalist–politician relationship can lead to a lack of caution (Ross, 2010: 279). Journalists can also feel embarrassed if they address political issues, which involve friends or acquaintances and therefore try to find strategies for overcoming such dilemmas (Larsson, 2002: 25). This crucial difference is reinforced by other aspects of local media and politics.

Firstly, there are limited information sources in many localities and this is especially important in the Czech case as the sector of local media is not well developed. The term local media here refers to the press, which is geographically strictly limited to larger cities and their surroundings. This media space is occupied by two titles – *Deník* and *5plus2*. *Deník* is a nationally published daily, but it has a dense network of small local newsrooms which provide contents for its 72 local mutations (Waschková Čísařová, 2009); the weekly paper *5plus2*, established by a billionaire Czech businessman, leading politician and media mogul Andrej Babiš in 2012, is organized on a very similar model, with 77 local mutations in early 2015. A considerable limitation of these publications, highlighted by representatives of civil society actors, is their distance from legitimately defined local affairs and concerns have been raised since – despite their proclaimed local orientation – the majority of their content is devoted to information of national importance (Hájek, 2013).

The second important aspect of the relationship between local – as opposed to national – media and politics involves individual journalists and their daily routines (see Franklin, 2006), with jobs in Czech local media considered less prestigious than in national ones. As a result, local newsrooms are staffed with journalists with lower levels of education – usually high school graduates with no academic or vocational specialization in journalism or media. Employees' fluctuation is also more pronounced in local titles,

<sup>1</sup> The notion of local is highly context dependent. When referring to “local politics” we mean politics at city level. The case of “local media” is slightly more complicated; these are media based in cities with the city being the most important frame of reference; however, their area of coverage (as well as readership/viewership) also includes surrounding smaller towns and villages.

where we find young people with quite low levels of media professionalism more often (Volek, 2007). Moreover, recent reductions in editorial staff and technological changes – combined with pressures to cover more issues quicker, for both the online and print versions of the paper – may increase journalists' vulnerability to political and corporate public relations and soften their watchdog role (Ekström et al., 2006: 259; Harrison, 2006).

The third factor that impacts on the journalist–politician relationship particularly at the local level is the specific character of local politics. In the Czech setting, ideological issues and partisanship play a less important role at the local than at the national level (Čmejrek et al., 2010). Local political conflicts more often focus on specific topics and tend to be temporary (Oliver et al., 2012: 7). Local democracy is thus described as less polarized, more open, and since local elected representatives are very often not full-time/professional politicians, political communication also tends to be less formalized and professionalized.

The specific historical circumstances of the Czech Republic resulted in a later professionalization of political communication in comparison with Western democracies. The first decade after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 was turbulent in politics as well as in media. The first years after the so-called Velvet Revolution were characterized by an enthusiastic atmosphere in which journalists and politicians were often considered to be partners, with both groups pursuing essentially the same goal – a free, developed and democratic society. However, changes occurred with the spread of commercial media when many politicians realized that they no longer shared values with journalists (Jirák and Köpplová, 2009). Consequently, at the beginning of the new millennium politician–journalist relationships settled into patterns commonly found in Western Europe and political communication became professionalized – first at the national and later also at the local level (see Matušková, 2006). One of the most obvious features of professionalization at the local level is the constitution of press offices, especially in larger cities (Larsson, 2002). Concurrently, a great number of local politicians receives advanced media training which allows them to communicate with journalists competently and effectively (Negrine, 2008; Louw, 2005).

Against this background, the aim of this study is to explore how local journalists and local politicians perceive the impact of the recent professionalization of political communication on the quality of their relationship. We are particularly interested in the transformation of their understanding of mutual trust and the strategies they implement for its maintenance or reinforcement.

## METHOD

The study reflects on the experiences of local journalists and politicians in the Czech Republic. Since we sought to explore the essence of their mutual relationship, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 local journalists (5 men, 5 women; 8 of them working in daily newspapers, one in a local weekly and one in radio) and 11 local politicians (7 men, 4 women; 5 mayors and 6 representatives). When selecting

interviewees, we used pair design, i.e. we attempted to pair a journalist with a politician from the same locality, or a journalist who is covering the locality (this did not work with one locality). The purpose of the pair design was to compare the perspectives of the two types of actors as well as to gain a more detailed understanding of the specific situation of a given locality. We could thus compare the experiences of politicians as well as journalists in a specific locality and more easily identify problematic issues in their relationship. Since the Czech Republic is characterized by relatively high levels of social homogeneity and the local media space is effectively occupied by two titles, when selecting the sample we paid particular attention to the length and diversity of interviewees' professional experience rather than the variety of geographical areas. More than half of our interviewees (12 of 21) had more than ten years of professional experience. The most experienced journalist has worked in the media for 26 years, the least experienced had only 1 year of professional journalistic experience. The politicians' careers spanned 3 to 24 years. Hence the interviewees were capable of describing the shift in shared values, the reinterpretation of ethical standards in journalism and the changing nature of their relationship.

Our research included large cities as well as smaller municipalities, four of which were districts of Prague, the country's capital, five were mid-sized cities with 22 to 50 thousand inhabitants situated in different regions, one was a large city with more than one hundred thousand inhabitants, and we also included a small city with only 5 thousand inhabitants. We decided to research different localities in order to investigate whether the general characteristics of the journalist-politician relationship are consistent across different local contexts.

The data were collected by 11 interviewers (graduate students of communication) who were informed about the research and were specially trained. We used qualitative content analysis as the study's method and we employed open and axial coding when grouping the data into general categories (Saldaña, 2013; Schreier, 2012).

## FINDINGS

First of all, when evaluating the impact of the professionalization of local political communication on trust between journalists and politicians, we assessed how both groups perceived recent changes. We then focused on how trust was understood and maintained by the different actors. We explored three main threats to trust that are related to professionalization. This allowed us to unravel discrepancies in the expectations of both parties that are linked to the normative requirements of a democratic society and the everyday reality of work.

### Nostalgia for the 1990s

It is evident from the interviews that the development of the journalist-politician relationship was an important issue for our interviewees. Since the majority of them were very experienced practitioners working in politics and journalism for over ten

years, they often tended to reflect on changes over time. In these comparisons between now and earlier times, they often expressed a sense of nostalgia for the 1990s which were described as an exceptional period in which journalists and politicians did not co-exist in a (forced) symbiotic relationship but rather in a partnership. In this glorified era, journalists and politicians were portrayed by our interviewees as cooperating on the common “project” of the democratization of society. Moreover, since they had not had previous conflicts or negative experiences with each other, they were less cautious about the other’s profession. Mutual trust was a natural component of the relationship, which was not bound by any formal or semi-formal rules. This mutually beneficial relationship presented in participants’ narratives underwent an apparently radical shift in the late 1990s when the stable environment was disturbed and later irreversibly damaged which led to journalists and politicians being more careful and suspicious of each other. They no longer saw each other as colleagues but rather as opponents who were forced to tolerate each other. Consequently, politicians professionalized their behaviour and implemented new conventions for their everyday meetings with journalists. In the case of politicians, new actors (mostly press officers) mediated their relationship with journalists and disrupted the familiarity between politicians and journalists. Although mutual trust was not compromised completely (it was necessary because the actors continued to depend on each other), it is now more fragile and threatened. The current state of trust is therefore determined as damaged in comparison with earlier historical periods:

*The trust is broken on both sides and the state of affairs will culminate in a fight. By the way nobody can win it but everybody has much to lose. (Politician 9)*

*A politician is an opponent and a partner at the same time. Even though he is more of an opponent because of the escalating tensions between media and politicians; in general nothing good comes from being in close contact with them. (Journalist 10)*

Interestingly, the fact that the relationships used to be more personal and less formal is mentioned not only by very experienced actors but also by those who have only limited work experience. As such, it becomes a common story and a professional mythology – as defined by Roland Barthes (2000). In some aspects it is reminiscent of the myth about the expulsion from Eden; from a secure and ideal environment to a more dangerous and threatening life on Earth.

### **Appropriate Relationships: An Unattainable Ideal?**

A more in-depth exploration of the quality of the journalist–politician relationship following this change shows that, contrary to the dramatic description above, both groups quickly found ways of co-existing amicably, whilst simultaneously incorporating communication professionals into the relationship.

Although the mutual trust between journalists and politicians is no longer a matter of course, an appropriate relationship still requires a certain level of it. Several journalists mentioned that their newsrooms have implemented strategies for developing a trusting, appropriate relationship with politicians. If a new journalist joins a local paper, an effort

is made to “introduce” him/her to politicians, which means sending him/her to press conferences or important local events. At the very beginning of a journalist’s career in the locality, (s)he is usually discouraged from getting into conflicts with politicians, hence (s)he publishes positive materials which in turn helps gain politicians’ trust and makes access to municipal representatives easier. Only when the relationship is established can journalists afford to criticize politicians without “slamming the door in their face” (Journalist 2, Journalist 5). Furthermore, the established relationship and mutual trust between the actors are constantly tested in new situations and if some limits are transgressed, they can be damaged. In the following we present three important threats which interviewees identified as the most important ones: a) when a journalist–politician relationship develops into a friendship, b) when there is a conflict of interests and finally c) the “over-professionalization” of political communication.

### Threat no. 1: Is Friendship Dangerous?

As already noted, the relationship between journalists and politicians at the local level is often complicated by the fact that the actors know each other from earlier times when they had different occupations (either schoolmates or co-workers) and thus developed friendships. The actors admit that at the local level they get closer to one another. Even though a friendship is unavoidable in many cases, it is considered unwanted since it can both damage their public image and complicate their work when it comes to professional norms. In general, the interviewees were anxious about damaging previously existing friendships when they became journalists or politicians. The interviewees also mentioned that when journalists and politicians are friends, the relationship is characterized by trust but this trust is constantly contested. In such cases, journalists tend to be highly suspicious a priori since they cannot be sure if their acquaintances or friends have honourable intentions or are trying to use a friendly relationship for their own political goals. As one journalist summarized:

*When a friend stops you and says he has never taken bribes, you start to think why the hell he tells you that. In such situations, you tend to be maybe more distrustful than necessary. (Journalist 4)*

For these reasons both types of actors try to find solutions to this dilemma and reduce a potential threat. There are two different strategies that help our interviewees cope with potential friendships between journalists and politicians. Firstly, they attempt to keep their professional contact to a minimum and thus keep their personal and professional lives clearly separated. Journalists claim that they try to refuse work on topics, which concern particular areas in order to avoid contact with local politicians who they have become friends with. The most common reasoning for such an action is that contact in such cases would violate journalistic ethics and thus jeopardize their professional approach as well as the relationship. We should mention that journalists believe that having no connection with local political representatives is ideal for safeguarding independent journalism:

*I am convinced that journalism works best if a journalist arrives from another town. He is a stranger and, ideally, he is so busy that he does not have any time to establish personal relationships because he would become biased eventually. (Journalist 8)*



In contrast, the second strategy does not attempt to avoid the interconnectedness between the actors' personal and professional lives. Here, the influence of journalist-politician friendships on the parties' professional lives is admitted, although the actors try to minimize their impact on their everyday work. Avoiding contact completely is, from their perspective, not a good solution. Interviewees tended to refer to public oversight and common sense exercised by individual journalists or politicians; after all it is in their own interest to ensure that their work will not be publicly questioned due to their friendships. Therefore they emphasized their professional approach and the shared rules on which the relationship was based:

*I do not offend them, I do not comment on their work much. However, sometimes it is also necessary to tell them that they exaggerated or wrote something different from what I had said. (Politician 9)*

There was, however, a different view also expressed by a group of interviewees who found friendship to be a distinct advantage, which they would try to utilize in their work. This pragmatic approach suppresses ethical questions and focuses more on personal interests. Friendship between journalists and politicians is thus understood as a tool for gaining exclusive information (for journalists) or for presenting the information to the public more easily (for politicians).

### **Threat no. 2: Conflict of interests**

Essentially, there are strong differences between the professional interests of journalists and politicians. In the traditional normative understanding, journalism should play the role of the watchdog, keeping a check on politicians' behaviour and protecting the public interest (Habermas, 1999; McQuail, 2013). Therefore it is obvious that under certain conditions the interests of the two groups may be contradictory. Journalists usually see these contradictions as a part of their daily routine and they do not pay much attention to it. As a result of these everyday clashes they express a degree of cynicism towards politicians but generally they try to show an understanding of their situation. Although their work is criticized quite frequently, this is perceived more as a common ritual and a mandatory part of the relationship, which does not affect their trust in politicians.

However, the situation is much more complex for politicians. They also expressed a desire to understand the difficulties of journalists who often have to do their job in adverse working conditions, but at the same time they are very critical and often object to their work. These objections sometimes lead to breaking the rules of acceptable behaviour and result in a loss of mutual trust. This is repeatedly due to the fact that politicians have very high normative requirements on media work. In general, politicians complain about the tabloidization and omnipresent negativity in published materials but they also have very specific opinions on what journalists should and should not do and what the newspaper should look like. In their view the main goal of media should be to educate the public and remain objective. The interviewees believed that if these four issues were addressed and changed (tabloidization and negativity decreased, media respected the value of objectivity and played the role of an educator), the relationship between journalists and politicians could improve and the degree of mutual trust could increase.

Moreover, politicians also demanded that the media cover fewer rare events as this happens at the expense of information about the everyday life of their locality. Politicians think that information provided by news media should not be excessively guided by the news value of negativity, which they consider over-emphasized in Czech local media. They stress that this can spoil the work of journalists because the public is not provided with information about positive or ordinary events taking place in their town:

*The negative characteristic of media is that they make people wilder and angrier. They tell them that all the politicians are bad and the people believe this because they hear it on the television, the radio and read it in the newspaper. (Politician 2)*

According to the politicians, the nature of media content is strongly related to media's focus on commerce and profit and this business-oriented nature of the media is described as undermining mutual trust. Since commercial interests force journalists to seek the widest possible audience, the politicians we interviewed raised questions about the real reasons for covering certain issues.

### **Threat no. 3: Professionalized and therefore suspicious: From dancing to a game of chess**

As we discussed above, the relationship between journalists and politicians is currently described mostly as appropriate and professional; the values of "correctness" and "professionalism" serve as normative ideals for both parties. Unlike in the past, both parties voice requirements about how the interaction between journalists and politicians should be conducted. For instance, meetings should be formal, more attention must be paid to the use of voice recorders, and politicians often ask for journalists' questions in advance. Nonetheless, professionalization is related mostly to politicians' behaviour towards media, contemporary politicians are expected to be able to communicate with journalists smoothly and in line with the specific practices of professional journalistic work, for example they are expected to give clear and short statements about public affairs. Communication skills and the ability to interact with media in a non-conflictual manner are understood as necessary in a politician's job – and this was argued by journalists as well as by politicians. A basic level of professionalization is required even from representatives of small municipalities who get in contact with journalists only rarely.

However, the professionalization of political communication can also have negative consequences for the mutual trust between politicians and journalists and therefore it is perceived rather ambivalently – professionalization is useful only to a certain extent. On the contrary, in some larger cities politicians' conduct is described as "over-professionalized" which can complicate the relationship significantly since journalists state they do not want politicians who parrot phrases from marketing handbooks. This raises the question of spontaneity, which is considered to be a necessary, though slowly disappearing part of the relationship. In some cases, professionalized behaviour can be even counter-productive. Journalists in our sample suggested that sometimes, if possible, they preferred to contact politicians with worse media communication skills because although they give less comprehensible answers, they can actually provide more specific

and useful information. If communication training shows too obviously in a politician's behaviour, (s)he is perceived as less trustworthy by journalists.

*I am not very interested in what somebody told him [a politician] that he is supposed to say. I want to know what he thinks and why. And usually you don't get such information at a press conference. (Journalist 7)*

At the same time, being professional all the time is in some cases not suitable even for politicians:

*One has to be able to not always provide a direct and perfect answer. I know it makes a bad impression that a politician is hesitating, but few people know how it works in politics. (Politician 11)*

Politicians' "over-professionalized" behaviour is not the only potential barrier for maintaining journalists' trust. Other aspects of the professionalization of politics must also be considered, the role of a spokesperson is criticised in particular. Local journalists consider spokespersons useless mediators and prefer to talk to politicians directly and while spokespersons are identified as useful in specific situations, for instance verifying factual information, in most cases they are perceived as a constraint. However, in local conditions politicians also tend to prefer direct contact with journalists and they use spokespersons only in exceptional cases.

*I have the contact details of the most important politicians and I go straight to them. It does not happen too often that they want to communicate through the press office. The press officials are the ones who are not able to comment on the topic extensively. (Journalist 5)*

This emphasizes the general feeling of both groups of actors that the professionalization of politics complicated what was once a cleaner cut and amicable relationship. Since there are other actors and institutions involved in the relationship, a greater degree of caution (if not suspicion) is needed. A metaphor of marriage provided by some of the interviewees is suitable here: "it is much harder to trust the other person when you know that there is someone else who aspires to be part of the relationship" (Politician 8, but also Journalist 5).

## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that journalists as well as politicians are often sceptical about their co-existence due to personal experiences as well as different professional aims, the relationship between the actors continues to be based on mutual trust. Unlike in the 1990s, this trust is no longer a natural part of the relationship but rather a fragile, vulnerable quality, which is constructed over a significant period of time and consistently threatened by both external and internal factors. This article identified and analysed three threats which journalists and politicians considered the most important – the danger of friendships between journalists and politicians, the possible conflict of journalists' and politicians' interests and the professionalization of political communication.

In line with other studies (Franklin, 2006; Larsson, 2002; Ross, 2010; Sigal, 1973; Strömbäck and Nord, 2006) of the journalist–politician relationship, we have demonstrated that it is influenced by many factors and that the field is ruled by a complex set of conventions. However, taking into account the specific history of the Czech Republic, our analysis revealed some interesting issues. Although in the 1990s some patterns of behaviour were acceptable or even desired, they are no longer eligible in current condition(s) of professionalized politics. For instance, a friendship between journalists and politicians is currently considered a potential threat to mutual trust. Moreover, professionalization itself is sometimes perceived as a negative feature for the relationship since it leads to higher levels of suspicion about the ‘real’ intentions of the actors.

Conversely, the development described in this paper can be seen as a separation of the fields of politics and journalism. As normative media theories suggest, a certain level of distance between journalists and politicians is essential for a functioning democracy (McQuail, 2013). Our findings suggest that although there is such a distance between Czech local journalists and politicians, its establishment did not take into account these normative ideals. However, there are certain normative expectations from the journalist–politician relationship, shared by representatives of both professions, which are linked closely to the issue of mutual (mis)trust.

Finally, analysis at the local level provides new insights into the current processes of political communication. Whereas at the national level journalists and politicians seem to continuously adapt to changes in political communication, trying to benefit from these without questioning change itself (see Strömbäck, 2008), at the local level perceptions seem to be more critical with other values playing a role – notably the quality of interpersonal relationships and the notion of journalists’ and politicians’ co-operation for the benefit of the local community. This belief, which is related to the reasoning that journalists and politicians are all part of the same community that they should work for, may form part of local politicians’ and journalists’ identities and may influence their willingness to trust each other (although more research is required in this respect). What distinguishes the Czech case, is the idealization of the short lived post-Velvet Revolution era as a time when journalists and politicians did not need any formal procedures to guide their relationship.

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# PRIJETNJE MEĐUSOBNOM POVJERENJU: ČEŠKI LOKALNI POLITIČARI I LOKALNI NOVINARI U DOBA PROFESIONALNE POLITIČKE KOMUNIKACIJE

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**SAŽETAK** Studija se bavi promjenama u odnosu između lokalnih novinara i lokalnih političara u Češkoj kao posljedicom profesionalizacije političke komunikacije, kako na nacionalnoj tako i na lokalnoj razini, nakon takozvane Baršunaste revolucije iz 1989. godine. Taj je fenomen već istraživan u zapadnim demokracijama, a u Češkoj je relativno nov. Unaprijeđene komunikacijske vještine političara te zapošljavanje komunikacijskih stručnjaka u politici utječu na povjerenje – temeljnu komponentu u odnosu političara i novinara. Članak se temelji na saznanjima iz polustrukturiranih intervjua s 10 novinara i 11 političara iz različitih mjesta u Češkoj, kojima je cilj istražiti na koji način oni shvaćaju i održavaju razine međusobnog povjerenja. Najprije smo opisali ključne komponente povjerenja te objasnili zašto se povjerenje smatra ugroženijim u doba profesionalizirane političke komunikacije nego što je bilo tijekom 1990-ih. Naposljetku zaključujemo članak istraživanjem triju najvažnijih prijetnji povjerenju koje su identificirali naši ispitanici.

## KLJUČNE RIJEČI

ODNOSI IZMEĐU NOVINARA I POLITIČARA, POVJERENJE, IZVORI, LOKALNA POLITIKA, PROFESIONALIZACIJA, ČEŠKA

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