

4 Professional standards of PR in three decades through the lenses of Turkish women presidents of IPRA

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Introduction

Public relations (PR), a profession in constant change, has evolved from publicity-oriented practices into varying degrees of professionalization and sophistication with the democratization of the world in the latter half of the twentieth century (Sriramesh, 2003, p. xxix).

Professional associations, such as Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), International Public Relations Association (IPRA), International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and European Confederation of Public Relations (CERP), paved the way to standardization of public relations and communication management practices. The role of women in this process is undeniable as there have been influential figures in the public relations industry throughout history. This chapter considers recent PR history through the prism of professionalization, based on the memoirs of three Turkish women presidents of IPRA.

In public relations literature, a number of research aim to analyse the roles and impact of women in the public relations profession (Broom, 1982; Toth & Grunig, 1993; Krider & Ross, 1997; Wrigley, 2002; Siler, 2009; Aldoory, 2009; Daymon & Demetrious, 2010; Creedon, 2011; Tsetsura, 2011a; Place, 2012; Grunig, Hon & Toth, 2013; Yaxley, 2013; Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2013; Öksüz & Görpe, 2014; Fitch, James & Motion, 2016; Tench & Topić, 2017; Lee, Place & Smith, 2018). However, those studies often focus on gender roles and the challenges women PR practitioners face worldwide. Regarding the associations' points of view, two studies are related to women in the IABC (1986 and updated in 2003), but only one study (Mc Donald, 2009) focuses on women in a PR association (PRSA).

One of the most reputable associations relating to the public relations profession is IPRA, which was founded in London in 1955 (<https://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/historyofpr/files/2011/11/IPRA-ARCHIVE-May-2015.pdf>), with the aim of raising the standards of PR practice worldwide. The association has had a number of woman presidents in its 60-year history. In 1995, Betül Mardin, already the first woman public relations practitioner in Turkey, became

the first Turkish and Muslim president of IPRA, raising Turkey's profile within the public relations profession and increasing international co-operation in various PR projects (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2014, p. 263). By gaining international power, the PR profession in Turkey expanded from being local to being global; hence, this phase was nominated as the 'International competition phase' in Turkish PR history (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2013, p. 97). Then, Ceyda Aydede, who was president of a PR agency named the 'Global PR Agency', became the second Turkish IPRA President in 2003. The founder and president of the 'Stage PR Agency', Zehra Güngör, became the third Turkish and 50th IPRA President in 2014 (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2013, p. 98). The period since 2002 is marked as the most recent historical development phase and known as the 'Integration Phase'. Technological developments facilitated integration of the Turkish PR sector with other parts of the world, mainly the United States and Europe; however, scientific research and strategic thinking are still undervalued (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2013). While Betül Mardin was active in the International Competition phase, Ceyda Aydede and Zehra Güngör are also representatives of the Integration Phase.

As Sriramesh and Duhé (2009, p. 368) asserted, the public relations activities of organizations are affected from the combination of social, political and economic forces that are powerful and pervasive. Hence, taking the political-economy approach of public relations into consideration, this chapter scrutinizes the progressive elaboration of public relations practice from the perspectives of three Turkish women IPRA presidents' within the three decades (1990s, 2000s and 2010s). The methodology is based on narrative analysis of semi-structured interviews held by telephone and e-mail, and the questions are derived and adapted from Li et al.'s (2012) study. The mentioned dates, names and facts expressed by the interviewees are checked through official websites, annual company reports, academic resources, media archives, curricula and other published interviews conducted with PR professionals in order to minimize the subjectivity of the collected data.

Professional standards within the evolution of PR

Public relations, as a twentieth-century phenomenon, is strongly influenced by social, cultural, economic and political advancements. Hence, it can be said that globalization, democratization and economic liberalization have important roles in the evolution of public relations (Sriramesh, 2003). Coombs and Holladay (2014, p. 123) claim that globalization, spurred by technological and economic developments, has provided both the opportunity and necessity of considering the role of public relations in creating a better society.

Mellado and Barría (2012) claim that as a profession, public relations and professional roles in public relations have been analysed by the literature as the normative and real functions of public relations practice that guides individuals' behaviour within an organizational context. In 1994, Wylie argued (as cited in Cameron et al., 1996, p. 44) interdisciplinary guidelines for a 'profession' generally include requirements for a well-defined body of scholarly knowledge;

completion of some standardized and prescribed course of study; examination and certification by a state and oversight by a state agency which has disciplinary powers over practitioners' behaviours. Parsons (2004, p. 15) claims the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, of which the Institute of Public Relations, the Canadian Public Relations Society and the PRSA among others are members, has made assertions on the topic. It states that a profession is distinguished by specific characteristics, including 'master of a particular intellectual skill through education and training, acceptance of duties to a broader society than merely one's clients/employers, objectivity [and] high standards of conduct and performance.' It is the last tenet that places professional ethics squarely in the domain of defining a profession.

Sager (as cited in Sha, 2011, p. 121) distinguishes professions from simple trades in that the former require specialized knowledge, continuing education, codes of ethical conduct and the ability to enforce those codes (i.e. accountability). Based on previous research conducted on professionalism, Sha (2011, p. 121) claims that the characteristics of a profession include standardized education grounded in a theory-based body of knowledge, professional associations, codes of ethics, accountability and public recognition, as well as accreditation or certification.

Li et al. (2012) constructed their research based on previous studies conducted on the professionalism of public relations, and they studied six dimensions of perceived professional standards as follows:

- Role and function of PR in organizational strategic planning
- Sufficiency in personal training and preparedness
- Gender and racial equity
- Situational constraints
- Licensing and organizational support
- Participation in organizational decision-making teams

Six dimensions and items within these dimensions are analysed through the lenses of Turkish PR presidents of IPRA with an historical perspective and taking political economy of the times, both locally and globally.

Role and function of PR in organizational strategic planning

Research and measurement

According to Li et al. (2012), an effective PR department/unit sets measurable objectives. Consequently, goal setting and development of strategies to meet those goals are important in everyday public relations practices (p. 708); thus, research and measurement are essential parts of the practice. However, research skills are usually a shortcoming for PR practitioners.

Watson (2012) commented that by the start of the 1990s, measurement and evaluation have become major professional and practice issues in many countries.

However, when Mardin became IPRA president, the Turkish PR industry was far from having a strategic understanding dependent on research and measurement. Measurement and evaluation issues began to be included on the profession's agenda from the mid-1990s onwards. However, organizations in Turkey were reluctant to include these items in their budgets because they still treated public relations as a vehicle to obtain quick results, just like advertising (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2014, p. 22).

Remembering the 1990s, Betül Mardin (personal communication, June 2016) indicates that one of the most important things for her is her client's image, and she would secretly investigate her client's image on their stakeholders. For instance, besides asking the opinion of her client's union representative, she would also ask the opinions of the client's neighbours, such as a market employee or a taxi driver, in person. She mentions that this kind of research would last for weeks, and she underlines the companies would cover the research budget when it was necessary. She asserts that research studies in the 1990s were mostly limited to image and reputation analysis.

The number of Turkish PR practitioners becoming IPRA members increased during Betül Mardin's presidency. Consequently, Turkish PR practitioners had the opportunity to enhance their relationships with the globalized world, observe PR practices worldwide and import them into Turkey. One senior public relations practitioner says: 'International membership opportunities provide us with innovation from other countries. Both IPRA and PRSA execute effective and accessible activities and thus we are inspired by the efforts from around the world' (Başaga, 2008, p. 108). PR executive Meral Saçkan (2007) also complains about the reluctance of clients to spend money on research and measurement. Another PR executive, Ali Saydam, mentions that 'Standards and measurement in the PR sector gained importance in the middle of 1990s. "How can PR be measured?" was a question for us to be asked'. Eventually, following the global trends of international companies being reflected by IPRA, issues such as standards and measurement were first brought to the agenda of the Turkish PR industry in 1997 (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2014, p. 262).

Ceyda Aydede states that in the first half of the 2000s, it was still impossible to say that institutions in Turkey set measurable objectives for themselves. 'Although there was scientific data, the practitioners had no tools to interpret and use these data for their PR strategies. We can't say they know how to use the scientific tools' (Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020).

According to Güngör, the world was not facing a significant economic problem and narrowing during the 2010s. She mentions 'The world was indeed a "Global village" and corporations were increasingly globalizing in those years'. Multinational corporations were investing in different countries. Both marketing PR and corporate PR gained momentum because of the increasing international marketing efforts. Research studies were usually conducted based on the PR needs of the corporations, and strategies were built on the research findings. Local corporations in Turkey, as well as in other countries, were not doing research in those years.

Aydede points out that the demolition of the Eastern Bloc has implications for the PR profession and its role:

When I became President of IPRA, it was a time when PR was trying to be spread more horizontally than vertically. Recognition and acknowledgment of the profession was our priority rather than strategically developing the PR practices in the light of scientific data, because there were still shortcomings in the field.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

Aydede states that she has adopted a mission of showing Eastern Bloc countries that PR is not a method for propaganda but is two-way communication. She has contributed to the establishment of PR departments in Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia and worked in Azerbaijan, which is also an ex-communist country. She has also organized a PR conference in Tehran, Iran, for the first time in the country's history. Aydede received PRSA's Atlas Award for Lifetime Achievement in International Public Relations in 2008. She was given this award for her extraordinary contributions to the practice and profession of public relations in an international environment over the span of her career (www.prsa.org/conferences-and-awards/awards/individual-awards/atlas-award).

Access to top management

Another dimension is that a practitioner should have direct access to top management, such as the President or CEO. However, Mardin complained this was not easy in the 1990s because 'The managers never had time for [them], they were always in a hustle, traveling continuously to abroad, to Europe. We were striving to reach them ...' (Personal communication, June 2016). Seeing public relations managers having access to company boards was a very distant dream for the public relations practitioners of that time. However, Güngör claims that PR practitioners could reach upper management directly and easily during the 2010s. Although most PR managers were operating under marketing departments, they were directly reporting to their CEOs or general managers.

Adaptation of professional ethics codes

Considering the role and power of public relations in terms of influencing public opinion, public relations practitioners are expected to behave ethically and take the interests of both their corporations and the public into account. As social trends of the past quarter of the twentieth century have resulted in the need for more strategic communication between organizations and their publics, there has been a concomitant increasing focus on the ethical behaviour of those organizations. As the interface between the organization and its public and, arguably, the keeper of the organizational reputation, the public relations function

has an even more important role as the social conscience of the organization (Parsons, 2004, p. 12).

Hence, a number of studies point out that the public relations profession should serve as the conscience of corporations (Heath, 2004; Fitzpatrick & Bronstein, 2006; Bowen, 2008; Hürmeriç, 2016; Tindall et al., 2017).

In 1950, the PRSA adopted its first Code of Ethics in order to provide guidance for its members exercising ethical behaviour in the field. This was followed by the Code of Venice in 1961 and of Athens, Greece on May 12, 1965 when the IPRA adopted a draft of an International Code of Ethics for public relations practice. Watson (2014, p. 707) states that most public relations professional bodies and trade associations, such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) in the United Kingdom, also have some form of ethical rules or codes.

In Turkey, there are two associations that deal with the public relations ethics. The Public Relations Association of Turkey (TÜHİD) that was founded in 1972 is the first association, which gathers public relations professionals under the same roof. TÜHİD has launched the 12-item Code of Ethics launched to be applied by its members at both corporate and individual levels. The second association, The Communication Consultancies Association of Turkey (İDA), which was founded in 2004, is the local representative of International Communications Consultancy Organization (ICCO) (Hürmeriç & Ülger, 2015). The Code of Ethics launched by İDA is prepared based on the ethics principles of the associations IPR, IPRA, CERP and ICCO (İDA, 2020).

Three women presidents of IPRA were asked about adoption of professional ethics codes during their presidencies. Turkey scores exceptionally poorly with respect to its business/private-sector corruption (Koç, 2006, p. 333). Mardin says that the disputes were usually about bribery; despite facilitation payments and gifts being illegal, they were frequently encountered by the companies:

Bribery was considered too dangerous. Extramarital relations were also important both abroad and in Turkey as significant factors that influenced reputation. The code of ethics was one of the first things to appear.

(Betül Mardin, personal communication, June 2016)

Nonetheless, Aydede claims professional ethical principles in PR were unknown in the 2000s. She says:

I struggled a lot in terms of this subject. My colleagues accused me of being an old fogey during my personal struggle because, at the time, I was arguing that it wasn't right to work with more than one client from the same industry. Today, the situation is different but, at those times, the strategies were hidden and we were careful not to disclose the strategies to competitors. We translated ethical codes into our language, tried to spread them, but I can't say they are applied sufficiently. There was a particular '*zakazukha*' incident. If some money was paid while sending the press

release, the bulletin would be published without any questioning, like an ad text. A Russian PR agency, which wants to decipher this situation, sent a press release about the launch of a shop that does not actually exist and they paid to the newspaper; subsequently, this fake news was published! That is not how it happened in Turkey but we all experienced an incident in Russia together at that time.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

Media non-transparency has also been known as cash for news coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), media bribery (Tsetsura, 2005b), envelope journalism (Shafer, 1990), paid news (Tsetsura & Zuo, 2009) and media opacity; non-transparent practices exist all over the world (cited in Tsetsura, 2011b, p. 172). Many practitioners use slang words to refer to this phenomenon: *zakazukha* is the name in Russian (Holmes, 2001, cited in Tsetsura, 2011b, p. 173). Even Aydede refrains from saying so; ethical issues regarding public relations and media relations were not so bright in Turkey. Koç (2006) investigates potential incidences of publishing custom-made news stories and editorials by newspapers and magazines about Turkish and international businesses for promoting their advertising space. Koç finds that the incidence of corresponding news stories or editorials in newspapers and magazines and related paid advertisements increased by more than 100% between 1994 and 2004 (p. 331).

Aydede also conveys her impressions about journalists who make news in exchange for money, and she narrates one of her research attempts with results that were unable to be published:

Through 2001–2002, in IPRA, we made a study on the *zakazukha* case, (with a University in America, but she does not remember the name). In fact, the sponsor of this study was the Hürriyet newspaper (flagship of the Turkish print press). The results of the study came to Turkey. When the findings were to be written, the editor-in-chief at that time prevented them from being published because he did not find them in compliance with his own approach. However, the newspaper's boss had already allocated a \$10,000 budget to this scientific study in which data was collected from all over the world on such an international scale. According to this study, whose results were never published, Turkey came out somewhere in the middle rank and Norway was the most successful country in terms of ethics.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

Concerning media and PR ethics, Aydede mentioned that the issue of racism in America was more prominent, and black people were experiencing discrimination where some newspapers were demanding money to publish stories of black people. She also remarked:

PR employees' relationships with journalists were the biggest ethical problem, as the relationships were not transparent. Here, the customer's

ethical understanding comes into play and demands can sometimes have unethical consequences. I had to respond to the media's demands too.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

According to Güngör, although PR professionals were indeed aware of the ethical codes of PR, it was still hard to generalize about the adaptation of these codes. She claims that while some corporations were meticulous about the ethical implications of their practices; some corporations did not give enough importance to codes of ethics.

Coombs and Holladay (2014, p. 25) underline that while most countries have some form of public relations association, it is a commonplace for only a minority of practitioners to belong to a professional organization and to be subject to its codes of conduct or ethics.

Sufficiency in professional training and preparedness

Formal education and necessary skills

As a dimension of professional standards, a liberal arts degree is considered appropriate training for public relations (Li et al., 2012). In Turkey, there was an evolution in higher education regarding Public Relations in 1992; all the journalism schools, under which public relations education was already established, now could offer a four-year Public Relations degree programme (Okay & Okay, 2008). Although Public Relations education had started then, the graduates were absent in the field until the new millennium. Betül Mardin mentioned that most practitioners who had various academic backgrounds, primarily law, were trained internally, and the company had been like an academy for new practitioners.

As an industrial engineer, Aydede thinks that analytical capabilities are extremely important for PR professionals; however, PR graduates hardly had those skills:

I was very surprised and upset for the lack of mathematics education and the inadequacy of statistical education in the communication faculties. That's why I did not prefer to employ communication faculty graduates, so I have been harshly criticized in the association (HiD, *Halkla İlişkiler Derneği* Turkish Public Relations Association, today named as 'TÜHİD'). I preferred graduates of departments, which include statistical education, such as psychology and sociology. Since they don't know how to do this, they are not able to be scientific and work based on scientific research. This is not a choice. I've tried to overcome this obstacle. I have acted this way because I do not prefer PR activities that are based on subjective assessments.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

The prescriptive model for public relations education, formulated by IPRA and known as 'The Wheel of Education', was proposed to suggest generally accepted educational standards. The model takes the form of a recommended curriculum

accompanied by a set of general recommendations pertaining to education and research (Ferreira, 1997). When considering public relations education in Turkey, it is seen that it is in line with the basic training programme of eight items proposed for public relations education in IPRA's Fourth Book of the Golden Book Series (Canpolat, 2012). However, Aydede does not think that the education, albeit in line with the formula proposed by her own association, is sufficient.

As the Internet was introduced in Turkey in 1993 in co-operation with The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey and the Middle East Technical University for academic and scientific use (Geray, 1999), Aydede mentions that the Internet was already in their lives in the 2000s, even though social media was not. Therefore, it was important that PR employees had technological skills, but, according to her, the most important skill was still empathy and the ability to perceive and analyse the other person correctly.

Li et al. (2012, p. 708) found that 'intuition is a major part of decision-making in PR', and Betül Mardin talked about the importance of her motto 'tolerance' while the other two IPRA presidents accentuated 'empathy'. Therefore, one can claim that not only formal education but also an ability to perceive people and society has always been crucial for standardization in PR practice.

Regarding the educational background of public relations professionals, Güngör claims, 'Although it can be said that most PR practitioners had received a PR education, a big percentage of PR practitioners graduated from other fields of social sciences, such as marketing and sociology. Additionally, a significant number of ex-journalists were changing their field and starting to work in the PR sector' (personal communication, April 2020).

Social responsibilities

In recent decades, consumers and other activists, including shareholders, have called for corporations to be more socially responsible. Hence, interest has grown in the concept Corporate Social Responsibility, especially since 2000 when the Global Compact was founded by the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan. Environmental concerns and that of marginalized publics (e.g. social justice movements) have likewise been included (Sriramesh & Duhé, 2009).

Aydede says that her company, named Global, is one of the first companies to sign the Global Compact in Turkey. She states that she has represented her company in the Global Compact meetings in Paris, Shanghai and the United States and has learned a lot about the concept of social responsibility. She states that in those years, many of their customers have been informed about this issue, and they have put a clause in their annual plans for making them a member of the Global Compact. Therefore, she says they were leading them to sign the deal. Aydede believes that a practitioner's function is not just a job but also performing as a public service to the community:

There was a green book I was trying to implement in my own company. With an application called 'Green Global', we tried to fulfil our environmental

responsibilities within the company. I believe in essence before communication. We set an example for others by doing Global Compact reporting but the concept of CSR evolved over time and began to be understood differently. It was reduced to activities that were carried out just for the sake of announcement, instead of the required activities. Turkcell has a social responsibility project called ‘Kardelenler’ (Snowdrops). They spent 10 times more money to promote the project, compared to the money they spent on the program.

The project ‘Kardelenler’ was a social responsibility project initiated by Turkcell, one of the leading GSM operators in Turkey, in collaboration with the Association for Supporting Contemporary Life (Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği). The project started in the year 2000 with giving educational scholarships to 5000 girls who were economically disadvantaged and willing to pursue their education. The project was expanded in 2007 and 10,000 girls across Turkey received a scholarship each year. In ten years, 9,634 girls graduated from high school, 3,437 girls started their undergraduate education and 976 girls graduated from the university. The project won 16 national and international awards (<http://yatirimci.turkcell.com.tr/2010/daha-fazla-sosyal-sorumluluk/kardelenlerb944.html?o=DahaFazlaSosyalAlt01&osa=dfs01>).

When the 2000s arrived, new regulations in the area of cultural policies were initiated in Turkey. Meanwhile, the EU membership process has also been influential. The government was also quite encouraging for the private sector to invest more in cultural activities through its regulations (İnce, 2009). Aydede suggests that this situation has repercussions in the PR sector, but she also mentions that there are faulty perspectives in that area. She emphasizes a dominant approach: ‘Promoting is the priority, then comes doing a good job’, and she complains ‘A good job already promotes itself. I don’t think I am good at explaining it. We trained our staff but unfortunately it was not possible to train customers...’ (Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020).

Gender and racial equity

According to the standards for PR practice and regardless of race and gender, everyone should be paid the same (Li et al., 2012, pp. 707–708).

Mardin states that in the 1990s, prejudices were exhibited because she was a woman, a Turk and a Muslim. She could speak English as well as her mother tongue, and she knew sufficient French to understand it, which made it easier for them to accept her. Even her European outlook has had an effect on breaking down the prejudices.

Although there is male dominance in the PR industry around the world, women started to get stronger in my time. Every time I spoke, I always talked about the power of women. I was saying that I was proud during official IPRA speeches (Betül Mardin, personal communication, June 2016).

Aydede remarks that neither her company nor her customers have a gender-based fee policy and comments on gender issues as follows:

I remember that PR executives were always men at international meetings back in the day. It is an industry where gender and racial discrimination shouldn't be made. However, in the early years of the 2000s, African-American employees were very few at international corporate conferences. In the period up to 2010, I've seen them more represented in the field. In Turkey, the PR sector was mainly predominated by women. However, with male journalists who were unemployed after the 2001 economic crisis, a gender balance in the sector was established.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

Güngör (personal communication, April 2020), argues that although PR practitioners in Europe were generally men in the 2010s, it was the opposite in Turkey. The number of women PR practitioners exceeded the number of men in the field. She also emphasizes that she has never encountered gender discrimination in the profession in Turkey or in Europe.

Situational constraints

A major situational constraint is that management perceives the public relations role as being more of a technician than a manager (Li et al., 2012). Even though the role of public relations professionals began to evolve slightly from that of a technician to a strategic partner during the 1990s (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2014, p. 11), Mardin mentions that most enterprise managers were still not aware of the real meaning of PR. She states that:

They mostly misunderstood the concept of PR and they expected a more direct tool to increase the sales, such as advertising. It was a real challenge for us to express that this profession was all about image and reputation of the company. They were still asking about why the profits did not improve that month!

(Betül Mardin, personal communication, June 2016)

In her analysis of the contemporary profession, she points out that the image of the term 'public relations' is directly related with the very own image of the PR professional. Mardin, being a PR expert in her 60s, benefits from the advantages of her maturity in this context.

According to Aydede, companies often understood the necessity of PR after experiencing a crisis. 'At some point, the PR suddenly became popular, it flourished, moved to the top positions. Between 2003 and 2005, executive staff were particularly lacking'. However, a public relations department was generally too busy putting out fires, like a crisis, to develop a long-term strategic plan, she concludes (Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020).

Güngör also claims that both in local and international corporations, PR practitioners were generally perceived as technicians. The only exception was when the PR practitioner was not solely responsible for PR but also responsible for the strategic planning of all communications management, including advertising. Those practitioners were perceived as and had job titles as managers. Unfortunately, executives used to underestimate the PR profession as they thought PR is a practice that can easily be done by everyone. We should criticize ourselves and accept that as PR practitioners, we were not able to explain our profession well enough (Zehra Güngör, personal communication, April 2020).

Licensing and organizational support

Public relations should be a licensed profession (Li et al. 2012, p. 708). Mardin recalls the 1990s and says, ‘Most of the meetings we had in IPRA at that time were about defining the rules of PR as a profession and about its accreditation. There were always discussions about professional organization’ (Betül Mardin, personal communication, June 2016).

Aydede talks about the difficulty of establishing international standards in PR and the competition between associations; she narrates one of the highest spots in her career:

PRSA has a certification program; I joined it. I finally took the oral exam and I passed it. However the management team of IPRA, who were aware of my attempt, was disturbed. They called me and said that IPRA already had its own standards and they were more important; there was no need for another standard. Because of the pressure, I gave up the written exam and, therefore, PRSA’s certificate. So, it is possible to say that the standards in the sector are not uniform and that each group produces its own standards.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

Güngör underlines the importance of licensing and organizational support for public relations and explains the efforts in the 2010s as organizing international conferences and congresses in order to emphasize the value and importance of public relations. She also asserts that notable associations today are carrying on these efforts. She also noted that she took serious steps in order to establish a chapter in IPRA, consisting of Turkic Republics (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan), Georgia and Turkey. Today, it is still in progress. She also visited Iran and West African countries and gave speeches about her professional experiences (Zehra Güngör, personal communication, April 2020).

Participation in organizational decision-making teams

In the 1990s, public relations professionals were far from being a part of the managerial team and by the end of the decade, they still had difficulty in assuming a

more prominent role in clients' decision-making processes (Bıçakçı & Hürmeriç, 2014, p. 263).

According to Aydede, PR executives were not on the boards of directors at the beginning of the new millennium. Here is how she summarizes how they did business in those days:

We went through a process like this: PR was perceived as work that women used to do in our country at first. With the Özal period and international expansion, with the arrival of foreign companies into the country, there were expectations from PR departments here in line with the changing wishes and needs. Therefore, it turned out that different features were needed for PR and the senior management of such companies began to put slightly more talented people in charge of these departments randomly. However, these people did not have sufficient knowledge, which they needed for the practice but this was now an executive position and they became very loyal employees to maintain their positions because they were in an administrative position and did not have sufficient professional background. They approved everything the senior manager said and, because they did not have the skills of the position they undertook, they began to pass on the manager's requests to the agencies without filtering them, without their own personal ideas. At the points we opposed them, there was a barrier between us in terms of communication because they didn't understand us and didn't have the courage to escalate criticisms to the management. When it was requested to access senior administration directly, the internal department had to be bypassed and the effort to reach management in different, strange ways appeared under obligation. This disturbing situation has prevented the progress of the sector.

(Ceyda Aydede, personal communication, April 2020)

According to Güngör, PR practitioners in Turkey did not have a role in the decision-making process of corporations. Very few of the PR practitioners in international corporations were actively involved in the decision-making process (Zehra Güngör, personal communication, April 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to reveal the progressive elaboration of public relations practice from the perspectives of three Turkish women IPRA presidents within three decades (1990s, 2000s and 2010s). Public relations is a profession strongly influenced by social, cultural, political, economic and technological improvements around the world. As a profession, there is an ongoing debate about the standards of public relations. PR scholars have investigated the role of public relations practitioners, examined the codes of conduct, gender differences, professional bodies of work and associations in various studies. In this study, six dimensions of professional standards were analysed through the perspectives of three Turkish women IPRA presidents. Betül Mardin, Ceyda

Aydede and Zehra Güngör, they all emphasized that public relations has been constantly evolving both in Turkey and in the world during their presidencies. Hence, there have been significant developments regarding the dimensions analysed in this chapter. There is no doubt that all three Turkish women IPRA presidents have contributed to the public relations field in their efforts of raising the professional standards. As the findings are limited to the framework created by the oral representation of three women practitioner's memoirs, they give us an understanding about their perceptions and priorities as directors of an international PR association.

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