



Small Grantee Feature

Yigal Schleifer: Workshops for Next-Generation Turkish and American Journalists

Yigal Schleifer recently received a Hollings Center Small Grant to organize a series of workshops for early-career Turkish and American journalists working in Turkey. Yigal has extensive experience as a freelance journalist in Istanbul where between 2002 and 2010 he worked as a correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and the Eurasianet website. During this time he covered Turkey and the surrounding region, and his work has appeared in prominent American and international media outlets in addition to his own blog, istanbulcalling.blogspot.com. Yigal was an active participant in both of the Hollings Center's Turkey-U.S. Next-Generation Dialogues in Istanbul, and he was awarded a grant in order to delve deeper into some of the issues discussed at the dialogues.

Yigal organized six training workshops, bringing together eleven American and Turkish journalists whose work spans the Turkish media landscape. Participants heard from experts in the field, shared their own experiences, engaged in critical discussions and created an ongoing support network. Workshop discussions focused especially on the coverage of Turkey-U.S. relations and the challenges of reporting on related topics across the region.

Sanem Güner, Istanbul Representative of the Hollings Center, recently sat down with Yigal to talk about the workshops.

Sanem: What gave you the idea to organize these workshops for young Turkish and American journalists?

Yigal: The impetus for the workshops arose from the lack of interaction between Turkish and foreign journalists in such an organized and collaborative format. There is a lack of understanding of how delicate covering the Turkey-U.S. relationship can be, and it seems like sharing information on a professional level would be very beneficial. I think Turkey-U.S. relations are really key, and I think there is a lot of misunderstanding and a lot of problematic coverage surrounding the relationship in both countries. Looking at the Turkey-U.S. angle helps to understand other regional issues such as Turkey's relationships with Syria, Iran and Israel, for example. There is also really never any time, as a journalist in any country, to just take a break from the daily rush of covering the news and reflect on your work, your coverage, your biases, organizational pressure and how these all affect what your end product looks like. Since there are not many dialogue conferences like those that the Hollings Center organizes, journalists have few chances to engage directly with colleagues who may hold different perspectives.

Sanem: What were the most interesting issues that arose in the workshops?

Yigal: It was very interesting for the American journalists to see how their Turkish colleagues arrived at their current positions. Young Turkish journalists are frequently thrust into positions of responsibility quite early without having a lot of substantive previous experiences, often without having worked as a foreign correspondent or necessarily having traveled much. On the American

side it is quite different. The American journalists gained valuable insight into how the Turkish media operates. Looking at regional coverage it was particularly interesting delving into how American news organizations covered the Iranian elections and how Turkish perceptions differed from American perceptions. Discussions were very valuable because we had people in the group who were actually directing that coverage, so it was not just theoretical. We talked about practical decisions made in the newsroom, why those decisions were made and what they mean.

Sanem: What did participants take away from the experience?

Yigal: It was most useful for the participants, I think, to get sense of how the press operates for their colleagues both at other news agencies and across national lines. Overall, I feel that workshop participants came away with better nuanced understandings of the Turkey-U.S. relationship, how the relationship can frame reporting on the region, how Turkey's regional policies affect the relationship with the U.S., how public opinion can shape media coverage, how the media shapes public opinion and gaps that exist in current coverage. Participants really saw the value in communicating this way about these important issues. All are very keen on continuing to meet and creating a regular mechanism for continuing their dialogue. I think this is the most important result.