World Press Freedom Day: MedMedia Launches Report on Media Regulation in the Southern Mediterranean region

The EU-funded MedMedia programme, in cooperation with the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), launched a major report on 3 May 2015 titled Assessment of Media Regulation in the Southern Mediterranean Region.

The publication was presented at the UNESCO's World Press Freedom day Conference held in Riga, Latvia, on 2-4 May. MedMedia is supporting the conference, through a side-event on 2 May, which brought together experts and representatives of regulatory authorities from the Southern Mediterranean, and a parallel session on "Regulation, Sustainable self-regulation and professional standards".

Covering nine countries – Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia - the report describes the main regulatory systems for the media in each country, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, in particular the challenge of excessive government control over the media.

Assessing regulation systems from various perspectives, including independence and diversity, as well as the different media actors and sectors, namely journalists, print and broadcast media, the report offers exceptional insight into the current state of regulation in the region. It also provides key recommendations adapted to the legal, political and social context of each country.

"The hopes raised during the Arab Spring of rapid media reform have largely been dashed," said Toby Mendel, CLD Executive Director. "Overall, systems of media regulation in the region remain subject to very significant government control and fail to incorporate rules aimed at promoting freedom of expression, media diversity and other public interest values," he added.

In many countries in the region, constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression are effectively overridden by ordinary laws, either because this is explicitly authorised by the constitution or because of ineffective systems for constitutional review of laws. Very few countries in the region have practical systems to limit undue concentration of media ownership and none has a robust system to promote media diversity, including through the broadcast licensing process. Most countries impose some sort of registration or licensing requirements on print media outlets, and there are often channels for exercising official influence over journalists as well.

Regulation of the media is often undertaken directly by ministries of information rather than independent regulatory bodies. A growing number of countries are adopting broadcasting laws, and some have established formally autonomous bodies to regulate broadcasting, but

only a very few have what could be described as a free, diverse and independent broadcasting sector.

"Southern Mediterranean media outlets operate in an increasingly challenging context," said Sarah Bouchetob, MedMedia's Senior Networking and Communications Manager. "Getting the balance right between creating an enabling regulatory environment and excessive regulation and government control can only happen if key national players develop stronger cooperation at the national and regional levels. We hope this eye-opening report will be a useful tool in the campaign for a more independent, diverse and responsible media, in the Southern Mediterranean region".

To read the Assessment of Media Regulation in the Southern Mediterranean Region, click here.

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