JOURNALISTS' UNIONS IN THE SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION STATE OF PLAY AND PERSPECTIVES

BY MONIR ZAAROUR AND NÉJI BGHOURI

MEDMEDIA

> " Without protection of journalists' social and professional rights, there can be no free, independent or quality media "

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Journalists' unions are key media supporting organisations; this report covers the pivotal role they play in the Southern Mediterranean region."

Journalists' unions in the Southern Mediterranean share similar mandates, in defending journalists' moral, social and professional interests, freedom of opinion and expression, and more particularly media freedom, and quality journalism. But their mandates are not identical.

Defending journalists' rights to employment contracts and fair wages and working conditions is central to the work of unions in the region, as in the rest of the world. But there is a marked disparity in the advocacy tools used by unions in the region.

Except for Algeria and Libya, journalists' unions in the southern Mediterranean countries do not face serious threats from political authorities, which endanger their existence or stability. But they are not immune to the crises that plague the media sector around the world and in the region, which impact journalists and their organized unions, including the collapse of the print sector and the rapid decline in the number of employees, the structural changes affecting journalists' work, especially in the electronic media, or the emergence of new profiles in news production, and the challenge of representing these workers. These challenges are made more complex by the lack of financial resources derived from membership contributions, which limit the ability of trade unions to employ professional and full-time union staff.

Although unions in the region face similar political, economic and social challenges, they operate in different legal environments and have different historical and working traditions. Journalists' unions membership conditions, for example, which raise a sharp debate about the nature of the profession, unclassified, as are medicine, law and engineering, which require no prior license. In addition, the profession of journalism is primarily related to freedom of expression, the right to express oneself freely.

Journalists' unions cannot be effective actors in media reform, support media freedom and enable adequate legislation and decent working conditions, unless they are a part of an integrated strategy in which journalists and media representatives play a leading role.

Most journalists' unions in the region consider professional ethics and journalists' duty in upholding the highest moral and professional standards, crucial. Numerous have adopted dedicated codes of conduct for members to abide by. In recent years, unions have begun to address a prevailing perception that failures in professional ethics are primarily the responsibility of journalists, and increased partnerships with key media actors focusing on the substance of the problem linked to a structural imbalance in the sector, political pressures and interferences, and a lack of adequate vocational training.

Laws regulating or related to journalistic work in the Southern Mediterranean are among the worst in the world, mostly laws restricting and criminalizing press freedom. Authorities in several countries in the region have reviewed regulations under the pressure of unions and national and international human rights organizations, to alleviate the damaging aspect of these laws. In addition to the support and contribution unions make in legal reform, they also provide legal defense services to journalists who face judicial complaints or file complaints concerning their working conditions. These services extend to non-members. In key cases, unions can mobilise entire legal teams, which usually work on a voluntary basis.

On the other hand, journalists' unions in the region operate in political climates which are highly restrictive of freedom of expression and of the press. Authorities frequently seek to enact laws to limit journalists' freedom or take measures to prevent journalists from working freely, restricting access to information, and citing national interests or the fight against terrorism to justify them. Generally, the number of opponents to press freedom and individuals preventing the disclosure of violations and corruption files is growing. The authorities aren't the only party exerting pressure on journalists' work, as corruption reigns within economic powers and hardline religious organizations who consider press freedom as a real threat.

In the end, most unions are open to cooperate with regional and international professional organizations to defend journalists' rights and develop the media sector. Recent years have seen a sharp increase in partnerships to develop professional training programmes, monitor press freedom violations, and reform the profession, on the regulatory and ethical levels.

Despite this, programmes to support union building and development, a prerequisite for the protection of the social and professional rights of journalists, are less attractive to the vast majority of donors and international media development organizations. Without these rights being upheld, free, independent and high-quality media cannot exist.

INTRODUCTION

Journalists' unions are key media supporting organisations and this report covers the pivotal role they play in countries of the Southern Mediterranean region.

This report aspires to be a light reading, not only for union activists and media professionals, but also for journalists and citizens, as it covers issues of public interest in relation to media, in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria.

This report does not present unions or countries in separate chapters, but focuses on crosscutting topics. It highlights the key issues and challenges facing the unions in the focus countries and provides recommendations for future initiatives on media development in the region.

By examining unions' work and their key challenges, it offers opportunities for cooperation and coordination with initiatives implemented in the region by other organizations and institutions.

1: MANDATES OF JOURNALISTS' TRADE UNIONS

Journalists' unions in Southern Mediterranean countries covered by this report share a general framework with basic mandates to "defend the moral, material and professional interests of journalists"[1] and "freedom of opinion and expression, particularly the freedom of the press and the media"[2], in addition to enhancing "the principles and traditions of the media sector."[3]

Their mandates, however, are not identical. Some unions engage in professional training for journalists, and have dedicated committees, which contribute to "developing curricula in journalism schools and faculties[4]. Others have committees dedicated to reforming the legal and regulatory environment governing the media[5]. Some, especially those established through national legislation, have an exceptional mandate to regulate the practice of journalism by defining legally a journalist, as a "member of a registered union"[6], or "prohibiting the practice of media activity to non-members of the union".

JOURNALISTS' SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS

Journalists' professional and social rights to fair employment contracts, the conditions of their employment, and their wages are central to the work of journalists' unions in the region, as in the case of journalists' unions around the world. However, there is a marked disparity in the bargaining tools used by journalists' unions in the region, including negotiation and collective sectoral agreements with media outlets and governments (as the largest employers of journalists through their control of the state-owned media sector), individual negotiations on journalists' rights in specific media organizations, public pressure campaigns, legal means based on labor laws and labor courts, and industrial action.
Collective negotiations and agreements are the unions' most effective instruments

in protecting journalists' social and professional rights, in addition to enhancing their editorial independence. Although national labor laws expressly provide the right of trade-unions to enter into collective negotiations with employers to reach collective agreements, negotiation mechanisms are not sufficiently used by unions in the region for reasons largely related to traditions, economic and social contexts.

The first collective agreement involving journalists dates back to the 1970s, negotiated by the Tunisian labor federation (Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens, UGTT) with the Publishers Association and the government. These agreements, however, did not cover journalists alone, but all those working in media and cultural sectors. The agreement was renegotiated and amended periodically. The Association des journalistes tunisiens (AJT) and then the Syndicat national des journalistes tunisiens (SNJT) were later co-opted to negotiate on behalf of journalists in a non-formal way. After years of consultation and preparation, the SNJT board finalised in December 2016 a draft collective framework agreement for the union to discuss and later negotiate with media employers.

In the region, the National Syndicate of Moroccan Press (SNPM) is the first journalists' union to have successfully negotiated a collective framework agreement for journalists by signing in 2006 a collective agreement covering journalists in the written press with the Moroccan publishers' association (FMEJ).

The agreement includes an introduction to the basic principles of independent journalism, including the role of media in the "exercise of fundamental rights" and "its strategic role in strengthening democracy"[7], and provides for minimum wages, permanent and temporary work contracts, training periods, allowances and other benefits. This collective agreement

was followed by another covering journalists working for the Moroccan television channel 2M.

In Algeria, several unions, including the Syndicat national des journalistes (SNJ), have negotiated collective agreements with private or state-owned media institutions. The Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS) is the latest union to have signed, in 2016, a collective agreement. The latter covers journalists working for state-owned media organizations Palestine Broadcasting Corporation, Wafa news agency and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida newspaper. In addition to organising work contracts, wages and safeguarding editorial independence, the agreement provides for journalists' right to safety training and work-related health insurance.

In this context, the IFJ encourages all unions to develop their capacities in this field and provides them with expertise and technical support, including the establishment of a regional unions' working group on collective bargaining.

Unions also negotiate directly with executive and legislative bodies, whether to improve working conditions of journalists working for state-owned media or legislation protecting media workers. The Egyptian Journalists Syndicate (EJS) is a model of this approach, having negotiated with the government agreements to increase wages and allowances of journalists working in state-owned newspapers.

Unions have been at the forefront of campaigning for journalists' professional and social rights, particularly in recent years, as the print media crisis deepened, leading to the collapse of the sector in some countries such as Lebanon. Unions have, in this context, pushed to open dialogue with the state on the crisis affecting the media sector and its freedom, a prerequisite for democracy, and for the allocation of public funds to support it.

[1] Basic Law of the National Union of Moroccan Press, Chapter IV.
[2] Basic Law of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists, chapter II, paragraph 5.
[3] Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate by law, Article VIII.3.
[4] Article 8, Paragraph 13 - Rules of Procedure of the Palestinian Journalists Bylaw, Article 8, paragraph 10.
[5] Article 6, Rules of procedure of the PJS's Bylaw, Article 8, Paragraph 2 - Syrian Journalists Bylaw, Article V, paragraph 17.
[6] Jordan Journalists Association Law, Article 2, Definition of Journalist - Egyptian Media Bylaw Law, Article 19.
[7] The Print sector collective agreement on the SNPM's website: http://www.snpm.org ;   http://bit.ly/2tX0EBX

Although the right to labor strikes is recognized in most countries, journalist' unions rarely use it as a bargaining tool with employers, as did the Jordanian Press Association (JPA) in 2015, supporting the industrial action of journalists working at Al Rai and Al Dustour newspapers, following the failure of the government to respond to their demands.[8]

The call for general or partial strikes by journalists' unions in the region is often triggered by the government's attacks or interference in the media, part of unions' mandate on press freedom advocacy. For example, the general strike called by the SNJT in 2012[9], or that of the PJS on all journalists to stop covering government's news until an investigation into the attack by security personnel on journalists covering a protest in Ramallah was opened and perpetrators brought to justice[10].

PRESS FREEDOM

In the political and social contexts affecting the region, press freedom and editorial independence occupy a central place in the work of journalists' unions, often in a way that overshadows other areas of work and consumes an important part of their energy and resources. Press releases condemning attacks on journalists, interference in their work, pressures or intimidation of independent journalists, remain the most widely used tool by journalist's unions. Most journalists' unions systematically monitor, document and publish these incidents in annual press freedom reports which include, in addition to individual cases, an analysis of media freedom trends and proposals for the authorities to enhance it.

In addition to their work at national level, journalists' unions work together to advance media freedom at the regional level. For example, journalists' unions in the region contributed for several to the "Breaking the Chains" campaign and its regional report, a media freedom initiative by the International Federation of Journalists. The five-year long campaign on the state of press freedom in the Arab region, showcased journalists' unions work in this field, demanded the abolition of criminal sanctions against journalists, and organized numerous solidarity campaigns for the release of imprisoned journalists. Unions are also involved in the production of the annual press freedom report published by the Federation of Arab Journalists.

Over the last three years, journalists' unions, along with other media players, have led a campaign to establish a regional mechanism to support media freedom in the Arab world, which included the development and the adoption of the Declaration on Media Freedom in the Arab World. The latter calls on states in the region to abide by a series of basic principles to safeguard media freedom. The Declaration has been signed in five countries so far (Palestine, Tunisia, Jordan, Sudan and Morocco), and work is underway in other countries to sign it.

The Declaration, in the countries which adopted it, provides a framework for dialogue and negotiations between journalists' unions and media sector players on one hand, and official and governmental bodies on the other, with a view to reforming the media and freeing it from the constraints that bind it. This, in addition to providing a basic reference that will determine the framework of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for media freedom in the Arab world, a position that will be opened following the establishment of the regional mechanism.

The biggest challenge facing unions in defending press freedom is the pressure exerted by politicians and economic powers on the independent voices. Recently, however, another challenge has emerged, linked to the technological revolution and the spread of social networks, including among journalists themselves.

Due to media organizations' difficulty to keep up with this trend and address its impact on the sector and journalism standards, there is great confusion about how to deal, professionally, with the content published on these networks, or how journalists themselves should use them. This confusion has led to the prosecution of journalists in many countries in the region and sometimes to their imprisonment[11] based on penal laws, for posting views and comments on their own social platforms or sharing citizens' opinions and comments.

There are several reasons for this trend, including journalists' frustration of not being able to work freely and facing editorial restrictions, and their use of social networks to publish their articles. This, in total absence of professional

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[8] http://www.shaabnews.com/news-54177.htm
[9] http://www.ifj-arabic.org/page-ifj-250.html
[10] http://pnn.ps/news/204651
[11] Article covering the imprisonment of Jordanian journalist Abdulhadi al-Majali: https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/08/25/jordan-release-journalist-post-facebook

guidance based on dialogue between journalists and media organizations, and lack of clarity on the role or capacity of journalists in using citizens' discussions or comments published on social media for professional reports.

There are also attempts by unions to find the appropriate ways to defend media freedom and freedom of expression on one hand and to develop professional guidelines in cooperation with media organizations to educate journalists and help them maintain clear lines between the two freedoms.

JOURNALISM ETHICS AND SELF-REGULATION

All journalists' unions give importance to professional ethics and the need for journalists to uphold the highest moral and professional standards in the performance of their work. Most unions have codes of conduct and permanent or ad-hoc ethical committees to deal these issues. Unions resist persistent attempts by governments and powerful players to use professional codes of conduct as laws to punish journalists.

Over the past few years, unions have begun to face a prevailing notion that professional failures related to ethics were primarily journalists' responsibility. But the real problem is the result of a structural imbalance in the sector, the fragile working conditions of journalists, the absence of editorial independence, and the lack of appropriate vocational training. Addressing these failures requires the management and media owners (public and private) to acknowledge their responsibilities.

REFORMING THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENTS GOVERNING THE MEDIA

This issue is not provided for in all journalists' unions' constitutions or internal regulations, but all work in a constant manner to amend existing laws or adopt new ones that protect journalists and

enhance media's ability to play their role. Unions are the primary negotiator with governments and parliaments in the region and are often the main barrier in the face of attempts to adopt legislation and laws designed to suppress press freedom or organise its control.

TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP AS A CONDITION TO ENTER THE PROFESSION

Freedom of assembly, including freedom to form organisations and unions and join them (or not to join them) is a fundamental human right, which is enshrined in a number of international conventions and treaties. Article 3 or the ILO Convention No. 87 adopted in 1948 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize provides that "workers' and employers' organisations shall have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organise their administration and activities and to formulate their programmes" (1) and that "the public authorities shall refrain from any interference which would restrict this right or impede the lawful exercise thereof" (2).

Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (1) and that "no one may be compelled to belong to an association" (2).

Nevertheless, the issue of workers belonging to trade unions and the balance of rights between individual freedom to join a union or not to join it, and the right of workers to a union that protects their collective rights is still a matter of debate.[12]

Until the 1980s, in a number of countries such as the United Kingdom, journalists' organisations were based on a "closed system", with provisions in collective agreements indicating that a journalist cannot be employed by a media outlet without being a member of a journalists'

union. The reasoning behind this approach is that the involvement of all workers in the union was a guarantee of its ability to negotiate effectively with employers and defend its members' rights. This also ensured that workers in the sector did not benefit from the union's achievements without contributing to its struggle in the form of membership fees. Two key reasons are behind the laws and regulations that provide that journalists should join unions, in several countries in the region. The first is to classify journalism as a closed profession, such as legal, medical or engineering professionals who must obtain a license from professional organizations to practice the profession. This reason is easily refutable, and if it had some logic in the past, it is now completely irrelevant to the social, political and professional realities.

The second is an attempt by governments to use laws to control who can work in the press and benefit from the union's protection. Membership conditions are then provided by law, imposing on journalists to work for a licensed media organization, while at the same time restricting licensing and imposing unjustified conditions on media outlets to obtain it.

Political and legal control of trade-unions and how journalists organize themselves and manage their affairs, is contrary to workers' basic rights and the principles and traditions of trade-union work. This also causes a permanent problem in these countries, exacerbated by the extremely slow process of reforming and modernizing media[13] and resulting in thousands of journalists working in new media being excluded from the legal classification of journalistic work and deprived from the possibility of joining trade unions and enjoying unions' protection. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination, which leads to deteriorating working conditions, loss of earnings and declining professional standards.

[12] "Are there human rights to not be a member of the Union of Labor Rights in the European Charter of Human Rights", Virginia Mantovalo - University of London for Economics - Worksheets in Law, Society and Economy 08/2007.
https://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/law/wps/WPS08-2007Mantouvalou.pdf
[13] In Egypt: http://www.alarab.co.uk article: "late recognition of online journalists in Egypt" http://bit.ly/2sz2dl4 ; and in Jordan: https://www.alaraby.co.uk/jeel/journalism/2017/5/7 - Jordanian journalists' union 'elections' ..' change comes late http://bit.ly/2rKcajb

2: BASIC PROBLEMS FACING THE JOURNALISTS' UNIONS' WORK

Except for Algeria and Libya, journalists' unions in Southern Mediterranean countries do not face serious threats from political authorities, which endanger their existence or stability. But they suffer from the crises affecting the media sector around the world and in the region in particular, which impact media, newspapers in particular, journalists' work and role, as well as their organized unions.

These challenges are made more complex by the lack of financial resources derived from membership contributions, which limit the ability of unions to employ professional and full-time union staff, which is essential given the complexity of information and the legal system, in addition to specializing of work.

POLITICAL PRESSURE

There are currently single national journalists' unions organising most journalists in Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Palestine. In each of Egypt and Lebanon, two unions operate, representing journalists working in the print sector for one, and those working in the audiovisual sector for the other. In Syria, because of the ongoing war, there are two unions representing journalists.

In addition to the complex reality and dangers posed by the war to unions, the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate and union activists in the Gaza Strip are under repeated pressure from the Hamas security services.

Otherwise, unions in the rest of the region are more stable and have margins of maneuver to face political pressures and continue to operate. This does not exclude, however, repeated frictions and periodic confrontations between unions and authorities, and indirect pressures aimed at pushing unions to align themselves with political positions or with opposing and critical voices.

Among other reasons behind the desire of governments to ensure unions' loyalty or neutralize their voices is the important status journalists' unions enjoy in their countries. Not only because they represent journalists and defend media freedom and freedom of expression, but also because of their political and moral stature in the

eyes of citizens and the fact that they count among the few national organizations that stood up to governments' attempts to tighten their grip and define the space of public dialogue, and the key role they played in their countries' modern history. Journalists' unions in Egypt[14,] Palestine[15] and Morocco[16], for example, have led a national struggle to get rid of foreign occupations and put an end to the colonial rulers.

Most direct confrontations that currently take place between unions and the authorities are due to either the determination of the authorities to maintain regulatory and legislative restrictions on media's work or to seek to impose new restrictions through legislations that are not compatible with international standards. Unions in Morocco and Tunisia have been particularly confrontational with their governments over media legislation. Governments in both countries have tried to control media regulators or adopt conservative media laws.

In Egypt, the syndicate's critical positions led to the arrest of many journalists by the Egyptian authorities for long periods without charges or fair trials. The government's attempts to control the union culminated with the arrest of its President, its Deputy President and General Secretary, accused of harboring fugitives from justice (arrested and questioned in June 2016 and sentenced in 2017). The three were convicted and sentenced to a one year suspended jail sentence.

In Algeria, journalists have been facing a social crisis over the last decade as a result of the fragmentation of the trade-union movement representing journalists. The national journalists' union, the Syndicat national des journalistes (SNJ) has faced, for years, a crisis affecting its ability to renew its internal democratic structures and organize General meetings to elect executive representatives, leading to members' withdrawal and the reluctance of new journalists to join it.

The National Federation of Journalists, founded at the end of the last decade under the umbrella of the Algerian

Workers' Union (Union générale des travailleurs algériens – UGTA), was unable to sustain its work as a national organization. After the resignation of its national board, only some union branches in media institutions were left.

Over the past years, more than five journalists' unions have been established in Algiers and other governorates (wilayas), but none have succeeded in bringing together the fragmented journalists' community. To date, thousands of Algerian journalists remain without a union representing and defending them, and work in a highly sensitive political environment and under dire economic conditions.

In Libya, after the collapse of the Association of Libyan Journalists which spoke for journalists under the Gadhafi regime, several attempts were made to establish journalists' unions. Because of the civil war and the enormous pressure imposed by politicians and armed militias, journalists were not able to unite under the umbrella of an organization that represents them. There are several journalists' groups, some organizing journalists in a particular city or region, within the framework of the Union of Libyan Workers, others established by journalists living outside Libya, as well as associations and organizations established to assist displaced Libyan journalists. There are new initiatives aimed to unify some or all of these initiatives, under a union representing all Libyan journalists

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

In Jordan, the JPA's Law stipulates that, in addition to membership fees, "1% of advertising income in the press will be transferred by the newspapers to the union's account." [17]

In Egypt, the EJS receives a similar percentage of advertising in the newspapers registered with it. According to the union's finance report of 2016, the union's advertising income amounted to four million Egyptian pounds during the precedent two years, with an overall

surplus in the budget of over 40 million Egyptian pounds.[18]

Over the years, this stable income has provided financial stability that enabled unions to employ administrative staff and provide essential services to their members, including financial assistance in the event of unemployment, health insurance and additional income upon retirement.

Some claim that these services provided by the trade unions are a double-edged sword. They provide social guarantees and needed assistance to journalists with low salaries, but make application procedures for new members very complex and lengthy, as new members will share the union's limited resources, especially since membership fees are symbolic.

As for other unions, the income from membership is barely enough to cover the union's running costs, including office rent and bills for water, power and communication services and the salary of an administrative staff. Difficulties to collect contributions in a regular and consistent manner add to their financial insecurity. In this context, union leaders and general secretaries work on a voluntary basis.

Journalists' unions represent a high percentage of working journalists (80% in average). Financial difficulties can be curbed through the recruitment of new members who meet membership requirements. However, increasing members' fees in a context of falling wages is unacceptable.

ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF INCOME

Unions therefore, seek to find other sources of income. Other sources include grants from donors for media development, public support, or an increase of union revenues by attracting new members.

Media development projects represent a major challenge for unions in that they require significant time and effort in preparing, implementing and reporting

[14] http://www.ahram.org.eg/News – "Al-Ahram called for its establishment .. and hosted its first meeting. The journalists' union: 75 years at the service of the profession and the homeland" http://bit.ly/2sZqbgz

[15] http://info.wafa.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=2471: The Palestinian press during the British mandate

[16] http://www.snpm.org. "The Moroccan union of journalists, from its establishment to its organising": http://bit.ly/2t3i7eR [17] Law of the Syndicate of Journalists, Article 55, A, third paragraph

[18] http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1090154

activities, do not essentially cover workers' rights (fair contracts, collective agreements, promotion of solidarity among journalists), but focus on freedom of expression, press freedom and professional training.

In many cases, journalists' unions feel obliged to participate in these projects, often carrying additional financial and administrative burdens, to maintain their presence and influence in the dialogue on the development of the media sector (as representatives of journalists and their interests) and to protect their status in a highly competitive context between international media development organizations and freedom of expression organizations in the region.

Without a fundamental change in donors' policies and programmes on media development, and the development and promotion of journalists' unions' work, media programmes will continue to constitute missed opportunities for journalists' unions and an additional challenge or burden facing them.

On the other hand, gaining public support without compromising their independence or risking being controlled by governments and political agendas is one of the most attractive options for journalists' unions. The SNJT this year reached an agreement with the government on the distribution of public advertising to media outlets and the allocation of half a percent of the value of these ads to the syndicate's solidarity fund[19]. This, in addition to allocating a piece of public land for a social housing project for journalists.

Some journalists' unions in the region, as others around the world, have started to discuss developing their unions' structures and working programmes, including membership conditions, to accommodate the fundamental changes in the media sector and the significant rise of numbers of professionals working in digital and social media. There is also openness to new ideas such as organising information producers, a vital and developing sector in the region, very closely related to journalistic work.

PRINT MEDIA CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON TRADE UNIONS

The crisis that hit the print media sector at the turn of the century in the United States and Europe is now a memory there. But it is culminating in Southern Mediterranean countries. There are no studies on the closures of newspapers or the reduction of editorial rooms, but since the beginning of 2016, there has been continuous news on newspapers difficulties or closures. The countries most affected by the crisis are currently Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and, in to some extent, Algeria. The other countries (Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco) have not avoided the crisis but emerged from it in the beginning this decade, and few titles survived it.

The Egyptian and Lebanese journalists' unions face a great challenge given the severe crisis affecting the press in their countries and because they only organize journalists working in the print sector. In Lebanon, hundreds of editorial positions have been lost since 2016 and up to half the number of journalists working in print. Other media organisations suffer from stifling financial crises and the collapse of part of them is only a matter of time.

In Egypt, the press, which employs most journalists, suffers from a severe financial crisis and accumulated debts of billions of pounds. It only owes its continued existence to government support. There have been discussions in the last two years about the necessity to review its organization and rationalize it.

Recently, there has been talk of stopping the print editions of bankrupt newspapers and keeping only their online version, as one possible solution. Journalists' unions, in this context, need to review urgently their laws and internal regulations to suit the requirements of the new situation[20], and this -- to complicate the matter further --isn't in their hands but in governments' and parliaments', who can amend and reform such regulations.

FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN VOLUNTARY AND OFFICIAL TRADE-UNION WORK.

Journalists' unions are mindful that journalism and the media sector are undergoing unprecedented transformations, and of the difficulty to predict what the media scene will look like a generation from now, to what extent the profession will change, and what will journalists' working conditions like. What is clear is that they will work in a tougher climate (perhaps by our current standards), and a more demanding and complex one too.

In this situation, the task of protecting them and providing services to suit their situation will be more difficult. For unions to maintain their presence and their ability to deal with future changes, they need to start preparing and changing, developing their structures, and enhancing their ability to collect and analyze accurate information on the sector and its workers, in addition to developing tools to communicate with members, the media sector, and society as a whole.

An important step that may seem obvious but has proven to be difficult in the past decade, is the development of professional and trained full-time union staff, that can support elected union leaders work, and follow developments on the ground, anticipate and prepare for change. This is all the more important as union leaders in the region — presidents and general secretaries - take on voluntary mandates and manage union affairs, while pursuing their professional work.

Union leaders manage all the political and daily administrative affairs of the union, and assume responsibility for research, planning and negotiation. Considering that most unions have rules that forbid chairmen to continue in office for more than two consecutive sessions, after every four to six years, the union leadership is changed and with it go valuable experience and knowledge.

Although, as mentioned earlier, the scarcity of financial resources can be a deterrent, investing in building skilled staff is a necessary step for unions to take.

[19] https://www.hakaekonline.com/content - "The Prime Minister announces a number of measures benefiting the media sector" http://bit.ly/2tWRt4g
[20] http://www.youm7.com news article: "Makram Mohamed Ahmed suggest to turn public newspapers into online publications" http://bit.ly/2sZ15hl

3: MEMBERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

Generalising similarities between journalists' unions Southern Mediterranean unions is an approach that sacrifices accuracy to easiness. Although unions operate in neighboring countries that face similar political, economic and social challenges, they themselves are substantially different and rely on different legal frameworks, history and working traditions.
The most striking aspects of these differences are union membership and union governance, in other words how unions manage themselves.

UNION MEMBERSHIP

Membership regulations differ from one country to another depending on the nature of the union and its basic law/internal regulations. In Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Palestine, membership in the journalists' union is not required for the exercise of journalistic work. The member is someone "who performs effectively and regularly a journalistic work within a media outlet or independently for several media outlets, has at least one diploma, and derives from it its main income."[21]

In Jordan and Egypt, membership in the union is a prerequisite for practicing journalism. Are prevented from practicing journalism (at least theoretically) those who are no longer members of the union. Journalists who join the profession will benefit from training supervised by the union. "During the training period, the trainee will be required to prepare a journalistic work …and submit it to the board before applying to the practitioners' register."[22] In Egypt, a special license from the union is needed to enter the profession of journalism and go through training in a media institution.

ENTERING JOURNALISM

The system of establishing journalists' unions in Tunisia, Morocco and Palestine differs that of Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. The first are based on the labor laws, are independent organizations and operate according to their internal regulations (basic law or rules adopted by union members in extraordinary session). Unions in Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon were established through national legislation approved by Parliaments and are funded in whole or in part from state budget.

These regulations impact journalists' practice of the profession, as some legislation authorize unions to regulate entry into the profession by defining the journalist as a "member of the registered union."[23] Some unions go so far as to "ban media activity on non-registered members of the union."[24]

In Tunisia, the SNJT has two members among the seven that counts the Independent committee for the professional journalists' card (the rest of the members are: an administrative judge as president, two members representing the association of newspapers and online news publishers; and a member of the UGTT's media union). Any person who meets the conditions stipulated by the law defining the journalist may obtain the journalist' press card, even if he is not a member of any union.

A CLOSED OR AN OPEN PROFESSION?

The requirement of union membership to practice journalism raises a heated debate about the nature of the profession that is not closed, like

medicine, law and engineering, and whose practitioners do not require prior license. The profession, in addition, is primarily linked to freedom of expression and limiting or preventing its practice touches the right of others to free expression.

The second problem is that freedom of association, including the freedom to form and join organizations (or not), is a fundamental human right. This right is enshrined in numerous international conventions and treaties, no one can be compelled to belonging to any association or union organization. The requirement to be registered in a union can be considered an infringement of a human right.

At the same time, some journalists' unions, such as the Tunisian and Moroccan ones, are trying to strengthen their membership to keep up with the issue of representation, in competition with other unions, or to increase their financial resources. Therefore, they extend to new segments of journalism such as freelance journalists.

Laws regulating unions in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon still do not recognize their right to organise membership. In Egypt and Lebanon, the inability of the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate and the Syndicate of Editors to bring journalists working in the audiovisual sectors into their membership, led to the establishment of the Syndicate of Media Workers in Lebanon in 2012[25] and the Egyptian Media Syndicate at the end of 2016 [26]

TRADE UNION GOVERNANCE

Union's organizational structures differ, as the way they govern themselves,

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[21] Basic Law of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists - Chapter VII
[22] Rules of Procedure of the Jordan Journalists Syndicate - Chapter 24
[23] Egyptian Journalists Syndicate - Terms of Membership
[24] Ibid
[25] http://www.lebanon24.com/articles/1487675704199742000/
[26] http://www.masrawy.com., article "Publication of the Egyptian media syndicate law" http://bit.ly/2rZsxgc

and the extent to which they allow journalists to participate in the union's internal life. In this context, unions are divided into two main groups (with some distinctions within them): the first, where unions' establishment and work are provided for by national legislation, and the second, where unions operate under internal regulations adopted by members.

The first group adopts a centralized management system, which is carried out by the union's board elected by a General Assembly and which leads the union between two congresses. Their electoral system is based on the attendance and voting of all members at the general assembly. Some unions in this group have branches in the country's main cities, and specialized committees on various key issues such as press freedoms committees, membership, training and professional development or social support. Members of these committees are elected either directly during the General Assembly, by appointment or through a mixed system.

This system, which was probably adequate in the past, when unions were small and most media workers concentrated in a narrow quarter within the capital, is no longer valid. Today, the General Assembly of the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate counts over 8,000 members.[27] This makes the organization of the union congresses an extremely complex matter, limited to holding the union elections with rare or no opportunity to discuss the union's working programme and action plans. In addition, the opportunity for journalists to participate in the union's daily life is limited to a few union activists.

The second group: In addition to the union's board and its regional branches and union committees, unions in this group have additional structures such as national councils or administrative committees, which are intermediaries between the Congress or general assembly and the board. These unions also have committees and union branches within media outlets which represent journalists in the institution and before management.

Union representation at company level is a building block of trade union organization, and acts as a front line of defense for journalists. The advantage of this method is that it allows tens or hundreds of journalists to be actively involved in the union's life and is a training school for union cadres to lead the union at national level.

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[27] www.youm7.com , article "journalists' union (EJS) quorum reached" http://bit.ly/2s3JZem

4: RELATIONS BETWEEN JOUR-NALISTS' UNIONS & THE MEDIA

In a region where violations against the press and media freedom and independence and restrictions on free trade-union work are on the rise, it is important that journalists' unions have a clear vision of their relation to journalists and the media sector in general. Journalists' unions cannot be active in media reform, support press freedom and adequate legislation, as well as decent professional and working conditions, unless they are a part of an integrated strategy in which journalists and media managers are all key stakeholders.

JOURNALISTS EQUAL TRADE-UNION!

The basic and simple definition of a journalists' union is the voluntary association of a group - even if small-, of journalists who share the same goals which concern them and their profession (we are journalists = we are a union). But the bigger the union's capacity to bring journalists together, the more influential it will be in defending journalists' material and professional interests, and in defending press freedom and demanding

better legislation from the authorities. When unions operate far from journalists and do not represent them, they remain weak and fragmented, and their impact limited.

In Algeria, the journalists' union is one of the weakest in the region, particularly given the country's lively media sector. There are currently two main unions organizing journalists there: the Syndicat national des journalistes (SNJ) and the Federation of Algerian Journalists, which operate under the umbrella of the

General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA). In addition to these, there are multiple ongoing initiatives by journalists to establish alternative unions and federations, such as the National union of Algerian journalists and media workers.

Nevertheless, the existing organizations have remained weak because they are not representative of Algerian journalists and have not held elections for decades. Algerian journalists operate in an active media sector, but it is polarized, reflecting the political and social challenges the country and the region experience.

Certainly, in the absence of one or several unions capable of representing most journalists, their capacity to influence policies in the media sector and defend their social and professional rights will be limited.

In Libya, the security and institutional collapse played a major role in the failure of organising a trade union representing Libyan journalists regardless of their geographical, tribal and political affiliations. Attempts by Libyan journalists since 2012 to establish a national union in the country, continue. The attempt by the Tripoli-based union, which was part of the Association of Libyan Journalists, is the first attempt to rebuild a national union of journalists, but a failed one.

In 2013, a General union of Libyan journalists and media was established. However, the union' regulations were unclear, and it was unable to hold its constituent congress. In 2015, an Independent union of Libyan media workers was established and an interim leadership elected. Since the founding members were based in Libya and neighbouring countries, especially Tunisia and Egypt, the vote was held electronically. There is no accurate information on the number of its members, which does not exceed a few dozens.

In another move, a group of Libyan journalists living outside Libya announced, from the headquarters of the Federation of Arab Journalists in Cairo, the establishment of a union of Libyan journalists working abroad. Outside of the announcement, little information on the details of the new Federation and its plans of action were made available. It appears the initiative aims to support network for journalists who have been forced to leave their country, rather than a union in the traditional sense.

The dispersion of journalists and the absence of representative structures have weakened press freedom and the rights of journalists in countries such as Libya, Algeria. Supporting press freedom and quality journalism that can contribute to democratic change begins with helping journalists to create union organizations, which represent them and defend their interests.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MEDIA

The relationship between journalists' unions and the structures representing media owners is often portrayed as an inherently unfriendly relationship, if not a hostile one. However, journalists' unions can cultivate fruitful relations of cooperation with of media owners' representatives.

The experience of cooperation between the SNJT and the Tunisian publishers' Association (Fédération tunisienne des directeurs de journaux) and the national broadcasters' association was particular, as they all joined forces in a general strike in 2013 against the Troika government at the time, which took steps to narrow media freedom and refused to enact adopted laws and decrees.

The SNJT, the Tunisian publishers' association and the Tunisian League for Human Rights, as a civil society organization, cooperated in the establishment of the Independent Press Council in April 2017.

In Morocco, the SNPM, managed to establish a professional relationship with the Moroccan publishers' association (FMEJ) and could secure, in 2002, the first collective agreement for the press in Morocco.

5: EFFORTS TO DEVELOP & ADOPT CODES OF ETHICS

As mentioned in the chapter on unions' mandate, most trade-unions in the region give great importance to the issue of ethics and the need for journalists to uphold the highest moral and professional standards in the performance of their work.

Many unions have adopted, over long periods of time, codes of conduct which apply to their members. The first have been adopted more than five decades ago, as in Morocco and Tunisia[28] ; others were adopted in the past decade such as in Jordan[29] , or in the current one, as in Palestine.[30]

In recent years, unions have challenged the prevailing notion that professional failures related to professional ethics are primarily the responsibility of journalists and engaged in partnerships with key media actors to address the problem, a result of structural imbalance in the sector, fragile working conditions, the absence of editorial independence, political pressure and interference, and the lack of relevant professional training.

In contrast to this union approach, based on the principle of self-regulation, some authorities as in Egypt and Algeria, have imposed professional codes of ethics under various regulatory and legislative forms. Similar attempts were made in recent decades by the Permanent Committee of Arab Media, which operates under the supervision of the Council of Arab Information Ministers, in the Arab League.[31] These codes were based on the Arab Solidarity Charter issued at the Casablanca summit in 1965.

JOURNALISTS' UNIONS' CODES OF ETHICS

Unions' codes of ethics form the principles and conditions which journalists agree on when they become members. They are general principles that guide journalists' work and which journalists should seek to abide by. They also aim to protect journalists against pressure or intimidation from management or political and economic powers to toe the line, convey propaganda or not to publish some stories.

Unions are responsible for defending journalists and protecting them in the event of such pressures. Those who have not adopted internal codes of conduct do have guiding standards to follow, either through their membership in the International Federation of Journalists, which implies, among other things, agreeing to " IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists"[32] or their membership in the Federation of Arab Journalists and adherence to "Charter of Arab Journalists".[33]

JOURNALISTS' UNIONS' INITIATIVES TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SELF-REGULATORY STRUCTURES

During the last decade, journalists' unions in the region deployed significant efforts in supporting the establishment of press councils, which include representatives from the unions, media and civil society organizations, to expand the responsibility base on ethical journalism. The first attempt was by the Moroccan journalists' union (the SNPM), which led to

the establishment of the National Independent Commission on the Ethics of Press and Freedom of Expression, which was enacted in 2005 after years of dialogue with media managers and civil society organizations.[34] Among its missions, it includes raising awareness on the provisions of the "Charter of the National Independent Commission on journalism ethics and freedom of expression."[35]

However, the Commission did not achieve the success expected, due to various factors, including the lack of financial resources to cover its functioning and its activities, in context of shrinking resources for the public media organisations and the national journalists' union.

The union resumed dialogue with media actors and the government at the beginning of the 2000' to create a national press council with a "common" basis, to be composed of media professionals and civil society representatives, based on national legislation which offers it the mandate to follow on media sector issue, on one hand, and public funding necessary to its work, on the other hand.

These efforts resulted, following difficult negotiations with the previous government, in the adoption of the "National Press Council"[36] in 2016 as the first self-governing press council in the Arab region. The council's tasks include drafting and publishing a professional code of conduct in the sector.

In a similar trend, the Tunisian journalist' union (SNJT), announced earlier this

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28 http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/270061.aspx.
29 http://www.jpa.jo/List.aspx?lng=2&Pa=Page&ID=4
30 http://www.pjs.ps/ar/pjs2/code-of-Conduct
31 The Council of Arab Information Ministers shut this committee in 2013 and re-established it in 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBu2uOrtdkk
32 http://www.ifj-arabic.org/about.html
33 https://misralhura.wordpress.com ; Code of the Federation of Arab Journalists http://bit.ly/2tCVg7k

year the launch of the Tunisian Press Council[37] a self-governing body, in partnership with the national publishers' association and civil society organizations after several years of consultations. Among its first tasks is the development of a journalistic code of conduct, in consultation with all relevant key actors.

Other journalists' unions in the region are pushing for dialogue on the establishment of independent press councils in their countries, including the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, which launched a dialogue at a national conference, held in the end of 2015 and the Jordan Press Association, which has been involved in such discussions launched by the UNESCO in Jordan last year.

GOVERNMENTS AND CODES OF CONDUCT

Drafting and adopting the codes of ethics has not been limited to journalists' professional associations and unions, and some governments moved in this field. The first example is the Press Charter[38] issued by the Supreme Press Council in Egypt, which was under direct control of the Minister of Information. The Supreme Press Council was dissolved following the promulgation of the Law on the Institutional Organization of the Press and the Media in the end of 2016, which provided for the establishment of the Higher Council for Media Regulation.

Although the Higher Council includes representatives of the Egyptian Journalists' Syndicate and media outlets, most of its members are appointed by the country's President

or ministries and government bodies' officials. The law authorizes the Council to "establish and apply the necessary controls and standards to ensure that media, media outlets and institutions adhere to the profession and its ethics."[39]

In Algeria, the 2012 Organic media law of included a special chapter on "the decency and ethics of the profession" which journalists must respect.[40] In addition to defining a list of principles that journalists should adhere to under penalty of punishment, articles 94-99 presents the establishment of a "Higher Council of journalism decency and ethics" whose members are elected by professional journalists"[41], as a self-governing council based on a "common" basis and entrusted with the task of drafting a code of ethics.

This duality has led to considerable confusion on this subject. This may be the reason why despite the provision by the law on the establishment of the Council one year following its adoption, nothing has yet happened. The absence of a union bringing together Algerian journalists is likely to play a major role in disrupting the establishment of this council.

Finally, the League of Arab States and its affiliated bodies have periodically issued media codes of ethics and moral guidelines to journalists over the years, as an attempt to protect Arab countries from criticism of other countries' media. Among these was the Arab Media Code of Ethics adopted in 1978.[42] , the "Principles of broadcasting regulation in the Arab region" issued by Arab Ministers of Information in 2008",[43] and the Arab Media Code of Ethics issued in 2013.[44]

[34] http://www.adrare.net/XYlZNWSK/copresse.htm
[35] http://www.snpm.org/archive/document_open.php?id=158&fid_rubrique=3&fid_cat=22
[36] http://www.mincom.gov.ma/ar/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/01/88.pdf
[37] http://news.tunisiatv.tn. " Milestones in the establishment of the press council in Tunisia" http://bit.ly/2szfuAL
[38] http://ncmf.info/?p=151
[39] Article IV, paragraph 3: https://alwafd.org – "Law regulating the press and media" http://bit.ly/2t3KDwW
[40] Chapter VI, chap. II, articles 92-99: http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/ar/dz/dz038ar.pdf
[41] IBID, Article 94
[42] http://www.startimes.com/f.aspx?t=19587126
[43] http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10626&article=458371#.WSfnOcbRY2w
[44] http://www.lasportal.org/ar/sectors/dep/Documents/%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%82%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%81%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%892014.pdf

6: LEGAL SUPPORT

Press laws in the region are among the worst in the world, mostly restricting and criminalizing press freedom. Authorities in several countries across the region have reviewed these codes under the pressure of unions and international labour and human rights organizations, to alleviate the most harmful aspects of these laws.

SECTORAL SUPPORT

In recent years, governments in Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Jordan have abolished restrictive provisions in their press laws, passing them onto penal codes. But conflicts and wars on terror have led to the adoption of tough and dangerous laws against the freedom of information and journalistic work in general.

For example, in Tunisia and Morocco, where authorities try journalists under criminal, military law or anti-terrorism laws. Or the prosecution, in Tunisia, of dozens of journalists each year, under penal or military codes, despite the Decree 115 which protects journalists and provides that journalists can only be charged under its provisions.

On the other hand, hundreds of journalists across the region face arbitrariness each year and are barred from performing their work by security forces. Their lack of awareness or understanding of laws regulating the profession is another impediment for them.

Unions must to intervene to raise journalist's awareness on their legal rights, and what measures to adopt in case they are prevented from working or accessing information.

The issue of defending journalists' right to fair work contracts, and decent working conditions and wages, is an essential part of journalists' unions mandate in the region, as in the rest of the world.

However, as referred to above, there are great differences in the tools used by unions in the region, including collective bargaining, sectoral agreements with operators and governments, individual negotiations on journalists' rights in specific media institutions, public pressure campaigns, legal means based on labour laws, labour courts and labour strikes.

Collective negotiations and conventions are unions' most effective instrument to protect journalists' social rights and enhance editorial independence. Although national labour laws expressly provide the right of unions to engage in collective negotiations with employers, the negotiation mechanisms are not sufficiently used by the unions in the region for reasons largely due to established traditions, economic and social contexts.

INDIVIDUAL LEGAL SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS

All unions in the region provide legal services to defend journalists who face or file judicial complaints in relation to their labour rights. Most unions also offer these services to non-members. The union is also able to recruit in large cases a legal team, which traditionally provide the service free of charge.

In this context, the Tunisian journalists' union provided legal support to journalists in 260 cases throughout 2015 and 2016. About 70% of these services were related to labour matters, such as consultations on labour contracts, interventions for conciliatory agreements at the end of contracts, or filing labour cases before Tunisian courts. The rest, around 30% of services, were provided in the form of support to journalists prosecuted in publication cases, or charged with libel or defamation.

2017 witnessed an increase in journalists' consultations on legal matters, whether in cases of employment, disputes with employers, press freedom cases, or even in the context of their work, when journalists ask for a lawyer to accompany them during police searches or security investigations.

In addition to their role at national level, unions have a unique advantage with their ability to pursue the respect of the rights of journalists working for international media outlets, which the local judiciary cannot act on. Cases can be brought through direct cooperation with journalists' unions in the country where the media's headquarters are located, or through the IFJ. Through this channel, unions can also provide legal support to their members who face legal issues in other countries.

7: ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

Journalists' unions in the region operate in political climates which are highly restrictive of freedom of expression and of the press. Authorities frequently seek to enact laws to limit journalists' freedom or take measures to prevent journalists from working freely, restricting access to information, and citing national interests or the fight against terrorism to justify them.

ENEMIES OF PRESS FREEDOM ON THE RISE

Enemies of press freedom and players who have interest in nurturing opacity of information and preventing disclosure of law violations and corruption cases, are on the rise. Authorities are no longer alone in restricting journalists' work, as corrupt and hard-line religious groups consider press freedom a real threat to their interests. In this environment, journalists and their unions need true allies among press freedom and human rights defenders, as well as policy makers such as parliamentarians who uphold the values of freedom.

Journalists in Tunisia and their union, in partnership with civil society organizations have succeeded in lobbying the government to repeal bills restricting freedom of the press and expression, such as the draft law on

the "Protection of armed troops ", as well as the proposed Circular No. 4, which restricted access to information. The SNJT and its civil society partners are battling the government attempts to disregard or counter decrees 115 on the Freedom of the Press, Printing and Publishing, and 116 on freedom of audio-visual communication and the establishment of the Independent High Authority for Audio-visual Communication.

In Morocco, the National union has succeeded in networking with local and regional civil society organizations during the prosecution of journalists following the trial of the head of the union, Abdulallah El-Bakkali. In similar circumstances, following the arrest of Palestinian journalist Omar Nazzal by the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian journalists' syndicate led a joint campaign with activists, national and international organizations, demanding the release of the journalist.

Journalists' unions need to maintain constant networking with civil society organizations defending press freedom and human rights. The battle for press freedom is not only about journalists, but about society, and unions cannot face alone authorities' policies to harass journalists, corrupt money or hard-line organizations. The public is the main

stakeholder in a free, independent and unbiased media, and the main ally of journalists and their unions.

THE NEED FOR MORE NETWORKING AND COORDINATION WITH THE WIDER TRADE UNION MOVEMENTS

Journalists' unions in the region have traditionally strong coordination with other professional unions in their countries, such as bar associations, doctors and engineers' associations. In some countries, as in Jordan, unions are organized in national coordination platforms and hold periodic meetings to discuss national issues that have an impact on the sectors in which they operate. However, such coordination does not reach the federative level.

With a few exceptions, there is insufficient coordination between journalists' unions and national trade-union centres, which means that they do not benefit from the heavy weight and influence of these centres, which gather hundreds of thousands of members. Particularly in the context of journalists' unions confrontation with governments on issues concerning all components of society such as freedom of the press and of expression, and the independence of state-owned media from government policies.

8: AREAS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXTERNAL COOPERATION

All internal regulations governing unions' work encourage cooperation with regional and international professional organizations to achieve their objectives in defending journalists' rights and developing the media sector. Over the past decade, most unions in the region have engaged into partnerships with regional and international organizations in various areas, the most frequent being professional training for journalists, reform of national legislation governing or influencing media work, monitoring and analysis attacks on media freedom and independence.

Despite this, programmes to support union building and development, a prerequisite for the protection of the social and professional rights of journalists, are less attractive to most funders and international media development organizations. Without these rights being upheld, free, independent and high-quality media cannot exist.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Although there is a clear mandate for unions to establish partnerships and cooperate with regional and international organizations active in media development, journalists' unions in the Southern Mediterranean are not equally open, free or enthusiastic to professional partnerships. Vocational training programmes are the easiest and most attractive way to cooperate and implement from the administrative and financial perspective, and because of their lack of political dimension.

However, the role of journalists' unions in this regard should be reviewed to focus on equality and workers' fair access to training opportunities, in accordance with labour laws, contracts and collective agreements. And to make sure that the training they receive suits their needs and strengthens the prospects for their career development.

Unions should not be responsible for running or providing journalists with purely professional training. Media employers, vocational training centres and journalism schools have the responsibility and skills to provide this type of training.

Journalists' unions, however, have a crucial role in organizing and managing programmes focusing on trade union education, press freedom, professional safety for journalists, labour and human rights, media ethics and a wide range of other issues and campaigns including diversity and gender equality.

COOPERATION ON MEDIA REGULATIONS REFORM

Cooperation programmes on media reform are highly sensitive because they are tightly liked to national sovereignty and political independence. Despite the FAJ's and the IFJ's ability to open a dialogue and cooperation with their members in all media related issues, based on their organic relationship, some unions prefer to keep a distance with international organizations in this area.

Efforts to establish a regional mechanism and adopt the Declaration on media freedom in the Arab World are particularly important in this context, as they provide a framework for facilitating and strengthening cooperation.

Experience in the past decades has shown that journalists' unions in the region occupy a distinct place in the field of legal reform and the adoption of media legislation as the main negotiator with national governments and parliaments. When unions lead these initiatives, they can achieve breakthroughs, such as in Tunisia for the establishment of the Independent High Authority for Audio-visual Communication and the Law on Access to Information, or in Morocco in the process of drafting the three media laws[45] until their adoption in the summer of 2016, as well as the current efforts of the Palestinian Journalists syndicate to reform the media sector.[46]

On the other hand, the experience shows that dozens of international and regional initiatives to achieve progress in the field of legal reform in Southern Mediterranean countries – regardless of the positive or negative content of these initiatives – in which journalists' unions have not been involved or contributed, have not resulted in the adoption or reform of laws and regulations.

This does not imply that they there were no positive results, as the initiatives allow debate within the media sector about international norms guaranteeing press freedom and media independence and raise citizens' awareness on these issues.

[45] For more on this subject, the SNPM report on the World Press Freedom Day 2016: http://bit.ly/2sdhwrD (summary)
[46] To learn more about the union's efforts and its negotiations with the government to agree on media reform policy:
   http://www.pjs.ps/ar/pjs-content/1577.html
   http://www.ifj-arabic.org/page-ifj-629.html

MISSED COOPERATION –LACK OF TRADE-UNION BUILDING PROGRAMMES AND SPECIFIC RESEARCH STUDIES.

The areas in which unions consider there are great opportunities of cooperation and partnerships with external organizations and actors are union capacity building, organizational training, union education programmes and research on the structures and trends of the media sector, which all lacks in countries of the region, without exception.

There are strong correlations between effective unions and greater protection of journalists' social and professional rights, and between job security and editorial independence.

Thousands of individual and collective cases over decades prove this interdependence, summarized by the IFJ as follows:
"There can be no free press as long as journalists live in poverty, fear and corruption."

There is no shame in reiterating this motto, particularly when resources allocated to support this work are so negligible they can barely be compared to the tens of millions which are annually allocated to initiatives on press freedom and media ethics, which have a high degree of abstraction and theorizing and are separate from the social, economic and political realities of the people who perform media work and produce journalistic reports.

The International Federation of Journalists conducted in 2015 a survey among journalists' unions in the region that showed they all lacked advanced technical tools and programmes which would allow them to have comprehensive information about journalists working in the sector.

They did not have information about their members and journalists in general, such as age groups, sector, job descriptions in relation to other variables such as gender, academic achievements, seniority and retirement schedules and other information that is crucial both to define work programmes and services that respond to members' needs and to develop plans to expand their membership base.

Development is needed to help journalists' unions use digital tools and appropriate monitoring software to organise members, adapt internal structures and develop relevant training for media workers.

There also is also serious lack of in-depth studies on the sector, necessary to enable unions to adopt long-term plans and programmes. Research should be done on media ownership, particularly in the opaque and confusing media landscapes the region has. This information is important not only for unions to negotiate with media owners issues of concern to employees, but for all citizens -readers, viewers and listeners -, because knowing the identity of media owners helps them understand the background of the reports they receive and perhaps the media's editorial line and potential links with political or economic interests.

There is need to study audiences' trends, media platforms with the highest following, and the changes affecting consumers' behaviour. There is little information about commercial and advertising activities of global search engines and social media networks and their share of the advertising market in the countries of the region.

This is particularly important in the wake of dialogues between journalists' unions, the media sector and governments on workers in these sectors, taxation of the revenue they generate and how these are used.

The last key challenge is to raise union awareness and education among media workers and union activists. For example, no union in the region has awareness and education programmes for young journalists about their professional and social rights as guaranteed in national laws or international labour conventions, or monitors closely employers' practices and policies are in this area.

This leaves journalists, young and women journalists in particular, vulnerable to exploitation and rights' violation by management, who offer unfair and sometimes illegal work contracts. In this context, one of media owners' most revolting practices consists in forcing young journalists to sign their resignations when signing their contracts, to avoid paying them compensations when dismissed. [47]

This is a good example of the problematic approach to the region in which one assumes that press freedom and quality journalism can be improved in isolation from journalists' social and professional working conditions.

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[47] One of these cases, which have spread in recent years in Egypt, can be found in the following article: http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/450539.aspx

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Although all unions have the task of defending social and professional rights of journalists as the core mandate, few have the necessary structural capabilities and expertise to negotiate with employers and manage collective agreements. Collective agreements are not only the most effective tools in protecting journalists' rights, they also transform the community of journalists into a conscious and organized workforce. Therefore, journalists' unions must take the necessary steps to move in this direction.

• The current national laws regulating work of journalists' unions present serious threats to their independence and their ability to represent and protect all journalists, despite the support and financial stability they may provide to unions. These laws essentially deprive members of their right to make all decisions related to their unions (such as membership, structure, internal democracy, etc.) and place it in the hands of politicians in the government and the parliament. Unions should be encouraged and supported in their struggle to take back their independence from politicians and place in the hands of their members.

• Experience shows causal links between the existence of strong and independent journalists' unions on one hand, and media freedom and journalism independence, which is a cornerstone of democratization and sustainable development, on the other. In this context, journalists' low wages and the small size of the workforce in comparison with other sectors pose challenges to unions' ability to raise sufficient income from membership's fees to pay for running costs and employ qualified staff. An open dialogue should be encouraged in the region among journalists' unions themselves and with state institutions to make public funds available to unions while guaranteeing at the same time non-interference in their affairs.

• Defending working conditions in journalism on the long-term requires from unions to be able to recruit all journalists in the sector. This requires from most of them to reform their internal rules, constitutions and the quality of services they offer to members. They must make a space in their ranks to journalists working in new media and new journalism professions.

• The role of journalists' unions is not limited to monitoring press freedom violations and reporting attacks. Unions follow up on cases with relevant authorities to bring perpetrators to justice and to prevent violations or attacks from happening again. Strengthening regional solidarity among unions will strengthen their voices and help them to learn from each other. Establishing an intergovernmental regional structure, such as the Special Regional Mechanism for Media Freedom will add a regional layer that can strengthen governments' commitments to media freedom.

• Journalism ethics and codes of conduct inspire journalists in their daily work, not laws imposed on them. The decline of professional standards in the media is beyond the will of individual journalists. Management's corruption, political pressure, long working hours, and low wages are more than enough reasons to cause havoc in the sector. Therefore, unions should be encouraged to resist any official or governmental body trying to impose codes of conduct on the media. On the other hand, they should be encouraged to lead initiatives to establish national structures of self/co-regulations to promote professionalism through raising awareness, training and self-accountability, in cooperation with media management, national institutions and civil society organizations.

• The absence of adequate legislative and regulatory environments remains a major obstacle to establishing a flourishing and independent media sector. Experience shows that chances of securing national legal reforms increase dramatically when journalists' unions are at the heart of this process. It also shows that most media reform initiatives – there are many, and sometimes competing - are introduced with minimal or complete lack of consultations with journalists' unions, which reduces significantly their chances of success. There is a need to adopt a different approach by the various actors working on this issue. In particular:

- There should be a national debate and agreement on the nature of the needed reform, the laws to be adopted or modified and prioritised. The results of this debate should be published and made accessible to all.
- There should be clear understanding between donors, international media development organizations and their national partners which allows for modifying or adapting ongoing projects to prevent competition and conflicts on the ground. This has happened in many countries across the region in the past and very likely to happen in the future.

• Donors' support to media development programmes for journalists' unions, their capacity building and reform are rare, almost inexistent. Given the current political situation in the region, there is urgent need to invest in strengthening the capacities of national journalists' unions. On many occasions and in particularly difficult contexts, unions, with their mandate and representation, have been the only organisations capable to stand up and confront governments and political and economic forces trying to control or impose their agenda on the media.

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