

EUROPEAN  
ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

ANNUAL REPORT #2018



SUPPORTING  
PEOPLE STRIVING  
FOR DEMOCRACY

HA



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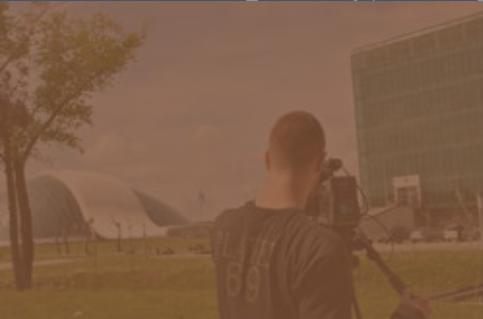
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## FOREWORD

The year 2018 marked the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy. I have been honoured to serve as Chair of its Board of Governors since the very beginning.

Let me recall on this occasion that Member of the European Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott and Member of the German Bundestag Markus Meckel, already in 2006 were strongly advocating for establishment of a flexible European mechanism to support democracy. Their vision was shared by Carl Bildt, Radek Sikorski, and Catherine Ashton, who successfully convinced EU member states in 2011 to launch the political process towards creating EED.

The Endowment was set up jointly by the EU member states and the European institutions. It has a unique structure where member states' representatives, MEPs, and civil society experts sit together as equals.

Unfortunately, the need for an organisation such as EED is today even clearer now than it was five years ago. Democracy is facing many challenges both within the EU itself and in the EU neighbourhood. Armed conflicts, hybrid threats, fake news, the widespread use of propaganda tools, growing populism, and radical

movements are directly affecting people's social and political lives. Many governments and authoritarian regimes such as in Russia, Egypt, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and others are not only cracking down on their own civil society and free media but are also influencing those of their neighbours with toxic narratives and corruptive practices. This is why the EU and its member states need to step up their efforts to promote democratic values globally by providing sound resources for democracy support and human rights protection.

The demand on the ground is growing. In this light, EED's work, as presented in this annual report, is more relevant than ever. Behind each project are the faces of courageous activists. Many of them work in very difficult environments, some of them even life-threatening. Yet they risk their lives every day because they believe in a better future for their country. They deserve our respect, recognition, and support.

Let us not forget this simple truth when discussing financial frameworks, budgetary allocations, operational models, and many other bureaucratic procedures inevitable in every action: democracy support is always about people – people who share our values.

**Elmar Brok**  
*Chair of EED Board of Governors and  
Member of the European Parliament*



# INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure and pride that I share with you the European Endowment for Democracy Annual Report 2018. Beyond providing important highlights of the year, the report presents a short general overview of EED's work since its inception to mark its fifth anniversary.

Since the establishment of the EED Secretariat in 2013, we have received over 5,000 requests for support, of which more than 700 initiatives have been approved for funding, worth about €49 million. We have organised around 100 events presenting the work and ideas of pro-democracy activists from more than 20 countries.

In 2018, we funded 145 projects in 25 countries, selected from more than 800 applications. For the first time, EED extended support to independent media and pro-democracy actors in the Western Balkans (see pages 50-51).

The key highlight of the year was the eruption of democratic energy in Armenia. Civic movements and a political opposition party managed to effectively bridge the strong divide between Armenia's civic and political arena and work together to achieve a common goal (see pages 27-29). Women and young people played a prominent role in the protests, which were peaceful and good-humoured. Indeed, in recognition of the role that

women and youth can have as democratic change-makers more generally, we dedicate a special chapter to their work in this report (see page 46).

Negative points in 2018 included the further deterioration of human rights and basic freedoms in Azerbaijan, Egypt, Russia, and Turkey, a reversal of democratic trends in Moldova, the introduction of anti-NGO regulations in Israel, and the lack of prospects for a peaceful solution in conflict-affected countries – especially in Syria.

It was from Syria that we received the saddest and most tragic news. Raed Fares, a great friend of EED and a charismatic and brave activist, was assassinated in November in his home town of Kafranbel. Syria has lost him but we hope that his legacy and those he inspired may one day help bring a lasting democratic solution to Syria.

This report also contains many positive stories, such as how activists are bringing hope to marginalised refugees in Jordan, fighting for internet freedom in Turkey, giving young people in Lebanon an independent platform for discussion, and combating corruption in Ukraine. At EED we are continually inspired by our grantees, whose dedication to creating a freer and more democratic world is an example to us all.

**Jerzy Pomianowski**  
*Executive Director of EED*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The European Endowment for Democracy has been supporting pro-democracy activists in the European neighbourhood and beyond for the past five years. In 2018, EED supported more than one hundred initiatives, including the award of 30 emergency grants. This report provides an overview of the different political environments in which EED operates – from transitional and restrictive environments to authoritarian regimes and conflict situations – and provides highlights of some of the initiatives we have supported in each of these contexts. We also provide in-depth case studies that demonstrate EED’s approach to democracy support, and tell some of the stories of the struggles and aspirations of our grantees.**

The five-year anniversary of EED provided a special opportunity for outreach activities, in the form of both a conference at the European Parliament and a video featuring a cross-section of grantees shared across EED’s online platforms, highlighting achievements to date. We include a special section in this report to mark our first five years.

## OVERVIEW

In the first section of the Annual Report we provide an overview of the initiatives we have supported across the different thematic areas. Civil activism and independent media remain the two largest areas of activity, each accounting for around a third of total grants awarded.

EED also hosts, organises, and attends a large number of events each year, from large-scale conferences such as UNESCO’s annual freedom of the media Difference Day event to focused roundtable discussions on country-specific challenges. Consolidating existing partnerships and developing new ones ensures that EED continues to serve as a hub for debate on democracy. In 2018, there were 28 such events.

## CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

EED works across different contexts, which present different challenges to pro-democracy activists and organisations. In transitional contexts, civil society has the legal freedom to operate, but may still face difficulties in mobilising resources as well as operating in environments where problems of corruption and vested interests of past regimes persist. In such contexts, activists can still face threats and intimidation. In these environments, EED funds many initiatives that aim to support independent media, strengthen civil activism, fight corruption, and build more inclusive societies.

In restrictive and repressive environments, the space for civil society is markedly reduced, with some organisations having difficulty registering officially. In these contexts, EED’s support is often more discreet and includes support for unregistered organisations and individuals. Media freedom is also a particular problem, compounded by the rise of fake news and disinformation, often government sponsored. As the case study on Armenia and its Velvet Revolution shows,



investing in strengthening civil society actors and independent media over the long term, even when their space for operation is restricted, can bear fruit when opportunities for change arise.

EED also operates in conflict environments, supporting activists within conflict-affected areas and those who operate abroad to support democratic change in their countries of origin. Such environments are extremely challenging, with activists often risking their lives, and many other donors do not operate in such conditions. EED has funded projects to promote human rights and to support refugees, independent media, and women and youth, among others.

### FOCUS ON WOMEN AND YOUTH

EED recognises the particular importance of supporting women and youth as agents of democratic change. Restrictive and repressive environments are often male-dominated, and encouraging women to become more involved in political processes and civic activism can help renew entrenched elites during periods of transition. Similarly, while women are often marginalised during conflict, they also find themselves having to take on new roles and responsibilities when families are displaced or torn apart by conflict. We also highlight in two features the role that men can have in advocating for women's rights.

Young people are often at the forefront of movements for democratic change, through student protests and mass mobilisation. Supporting new generations of activists can help consolidate democratic progress

and ensure it takes root for the long term. EED has supported a number of youth projects in Tunisia that aim to build on progress achieved during the Arab Spring. Similarly, many of EED's initiatives in Ukraine help young people to get more involved in contributing to social progress in the wake of the Euromaidan.

### OPENING THE DOOR TO THE WESTERN BALKANS

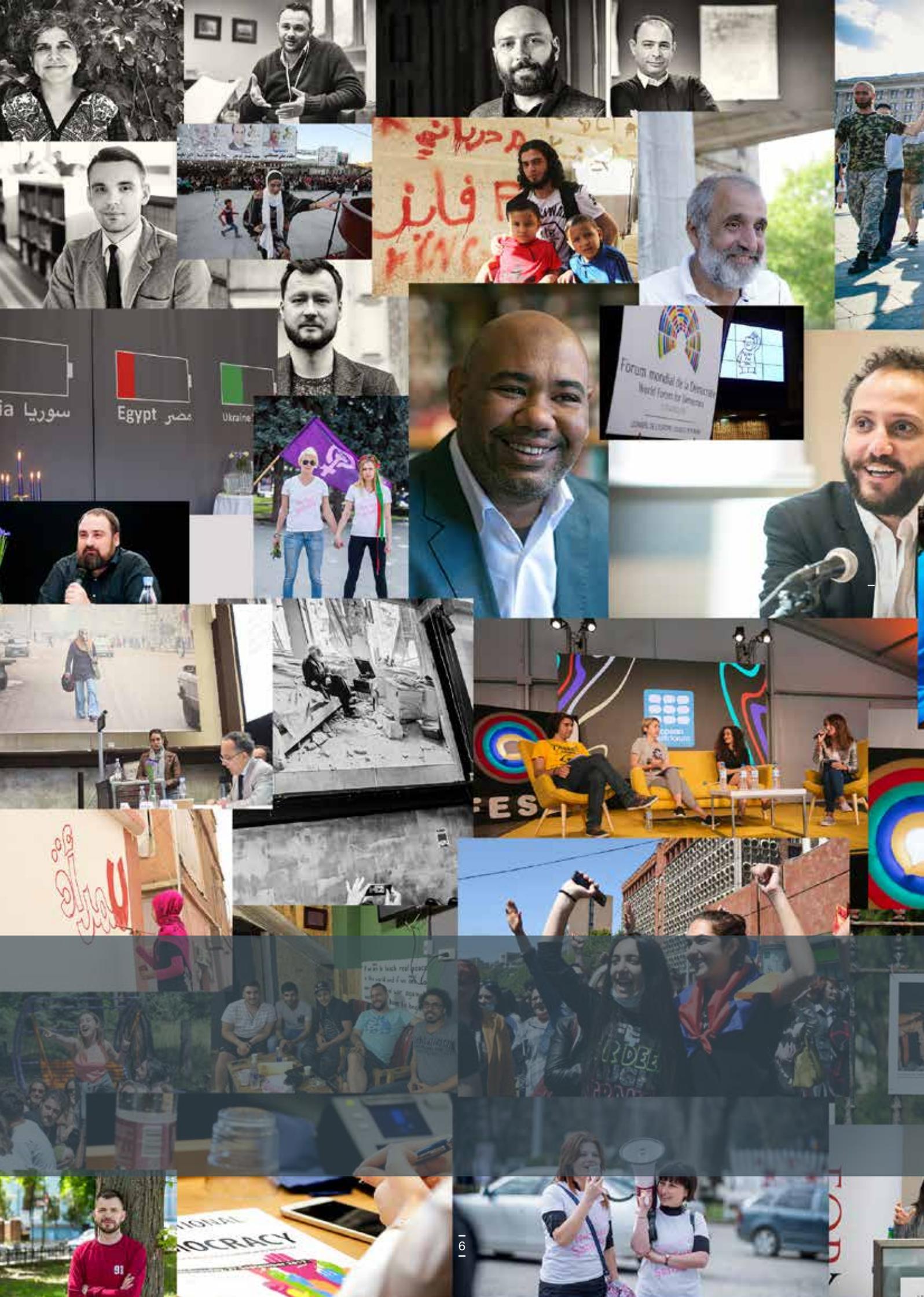
In 2018, EED opened its grants to applications from the Western Balkans for the first time. This decision was taken following a recognition of specific challenges in these countries. EED will generally not support long-standing organisations but will rather focus on new independent media, civil society, and youth, particularly those with new and innovative approaches to activism and engagement. Fourteen grants were awarded in 2018.

### LEARNING AND RESULTS

To ensure that grants are awarded in the most effective way, bringing added value, EED carries out various types of monitoring and evaluation missions to better understand the impact of EED's work, and to identify good practices and lessons learned. This year, monitoring missions were carried out in Ukraine, Armenia, and Moldova that looked at issues from regional, sectoral, and thematic perspectives.

### BUDGET

To date, 23 European countries, who are members of the Board of Governors, as well as Canada, have contributed to EED's programme budget. EED's operational costs are covered by a grant from the European Commission, which ensures institutional stability.





# RETROSPECTION

EUROPEAN  
FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY

WAR  
DIALOGUE  
DEMOCRACY

# RETROSPECTION

**In 2018, EED celebrated its fifth anniversary. In just five years it has established itself as an innovative and highly valued player in the democracy support landscape. Set up in the wake of the Arab Spring to meet the growing need for fast and flexible support for activists, EED has enabled hundreds of dedicated and courageous citizens to become change-makers for democracy in their countries.**

## ORIGINS

The idea for a mechanism to support people striving for democracy in the EU neighbourhood first came about in 2011, in the wake of the Arab Spring. It was recognised that political change can occur suddenly, with events on the ground developing fast. Existing EU mechanisms for delivering support to emerging pro-democracy actors were too rigid and too slow to support people when they most needed it. The need for a way for Europeans to provide flexible, non-bureaucratic, and speedy support, including to non-registered groups and individuals, was recognised by the then-High Representative on Foreign Policy, Catherine Ashton, as well as by Members of the European Parliament.

The proposal for EED, which took shape during the Polish Presidency of the European Council, led to the establishment of EED and the opening of its Secretariat in 2013. Its foundation is a symbol of European solidarity with the democratic aspirations of the peoples of the EU neighbourhood.

## THE BEGINNINGS

EED's first grant was awarded to Meydan TV, an independent online media for Azerbaijan. Since then, EED has awarded hundreds of grants to initiatives across the EU neighbourhood countries and beyond, about a third of them supporting journalists and independent media.

## AN UNCONVENTIONAL APPROACH TO SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY

EED is open to innovative ideas and creative approaches to finding new entry points to support democratic progress, especially in more closed societies. Some of the more unconventional initiatives funded to date include cartoonists breaking social and political taboos, rappers tackling social issues, podcasters reviving storytelling traditions, and filmmakers approaching conflict themes through animation.

To mark EED's fifth anniversary, representatives of the EU institutions, Member States, EED beneficiaries, and members of the democracy support community were invited to a conference at the European Parliament on 27 June 2018, alongside some of EED's past and current grantees, who shared their stories. Lesia Vasylenko, the founder of the Ukrainian organisation Legal Hundred, which helps military veterans claim their legal rights; Omar Belfrej, representing the Clarite Ambition Courage Movement, a political movement aiming to develop a political alternative for Morocco; and Ashraf Al Hafny, the founder of Lamsat Ward, which works with Syrian refugees in Lebanon talked about the role that EED had played in supporting their organisations and the challenges they still face.

***“The objective of the Endowment will be to foster and encourage “deep and sustainable democracy” in transition countries and in societies struggling for democratisation, with initial, although not exclusive, focus on the European Neighbourhood.”***

**Declaration on the Establishment of a European Endowment for Democracy, 2011**

## RETROSPECTION



*"Humour is actually very liberating, so when people started understanding that they can make fun of something, they started not to fear it. It would empower them to speak up."*

Vardine Grigoryan, MediaLab, Armenia



*"I made a decision not to be silenced in a country where millions are silenced or live in fear. Meydan TV is a story about how independent media can reach out to millions of people in closed societies, to those who feel they are voiceless. We are giving them a voice."*

Emin Milli

## RETROSPECTION

*“In the tough reality of war, the civil society like ours got an opportunity to prove itself, to come and work together towards a better future.”*

Lesia Vasylenko, Legal  
Hundred NGO, Ukraine

*“We are trying to convince the Moroccan people that democracy is crucial to achieve things in terms of development, not just a romantic myth to chase.”*

Omar Belfreij, Clarite  
Ambition Courage  
Movement



### EED TODAY

Today, EED funds a vast array of both registered and unregistered pro-democracy actors including political and human rights activists, pro-democracy movements, civil society organisations, emerging leaders, independent media, and journalists that may not be able to obtain funding otherwise. Support is contingent on adherence to democratic values, respect for international human rights, and observance of principles of non-violence by the grantees. EED focuses on projects where it can add specific value, complementing other EU and member state democracy-support programmes. Its support is demand-driven, based on a principle of fostering democracy and facilitating initiatives of local actors. EED specialises in cases where the space for civil

society is shrinking due to administrative, legal, social, and political barriers, and it accepts significant political and operational risks as part of its methodology.

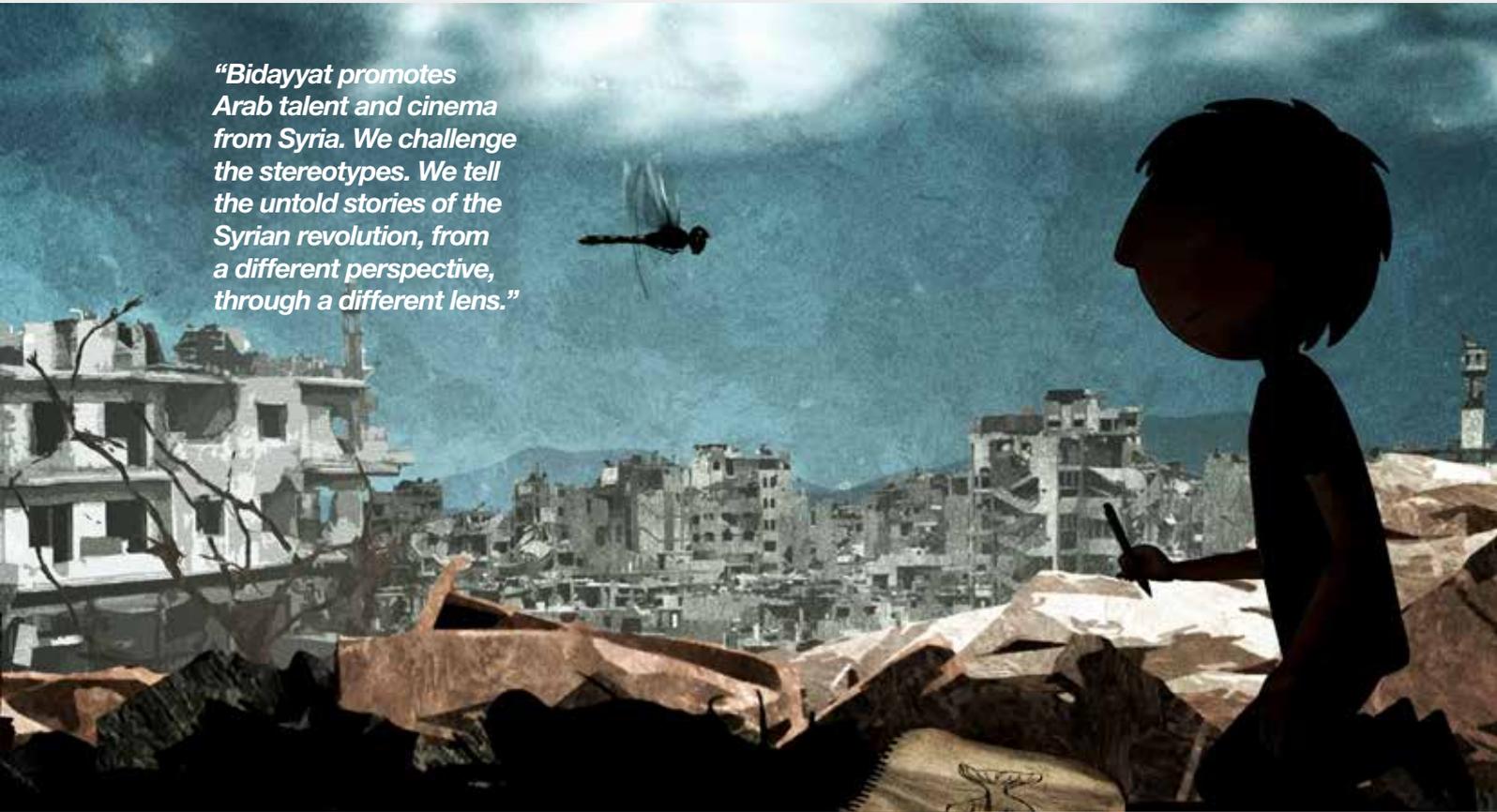
### WHERE WE WORK

EED's activities focus primarily on the European neighbourhood (Eastern Partnership and the Middle East and North Africa regions, and as of 2018 also the Western Balkans) and aim to ensure, as far as possible, a geographical balance of engagement and funding.

Some grants may be provided for relevant applications from countries in the area adjacent to the neighbourhood depending on needs, available funds, and political priorities.

*“We might face challenges with regards to access to basic livelihoods and life in dignity, but we are not just poor refugees in need of aid, we are people with passion and history. We want these young people to be convinced they will go back to rebuild their country.”* Ashraf Al Hafny, Lamsat Ward, Lebanon/Syria

*“Bidayyat promotes Arab talent and cinema from Syria. We challenge the stereotypes. We tell the untold stories of the Syrian revolution, from a different perspective, through a different lens.”*



### EED'S FIRST FIVE YEARS IN NUMBERS



**5,027** requests for support received



**722** initiatives funded



**€49m** in grant support



**82** initiatives funded under the emergency support procedure

**“ EED does not only help civil society and media with funds, but more importantly, provides them with courage and support to go forward in these difficult times. ”**

Elmar Brok MEP, Chair of EED Board of Governors



MOROCCO

ALGERIA

TUNISIA

LIBYA

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the portfolio of initiatives, special achievements of some of our grantees, and highlights of our events and partnerships during 2018.

\* This designation is without prejudice on status, and is in line with the UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



RUSSIA

BELARUS

UKRAINE

MOLDOVA

GEORGIA

SERBIA  
BOSNIA AND  
HERZEGOVINA

MONTENEGRO

ALBANIA KOSOVO\*

NORTH MACEDONIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

TURKEY

SYRIA

LEBANON

ISRAEL

JORDAN

PALESTINE

EGYPT

# 1. OVERVIEW

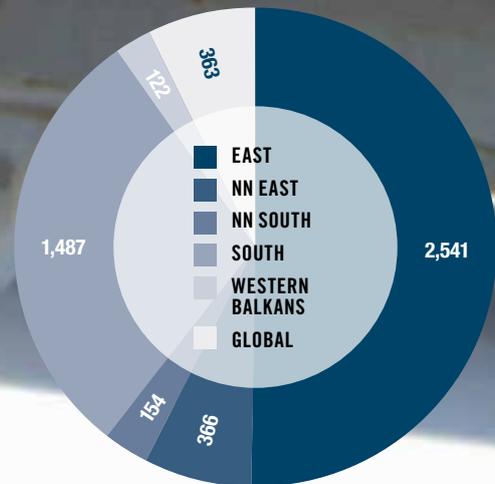
# 1.1 OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

## 2018 IN NUMBERS

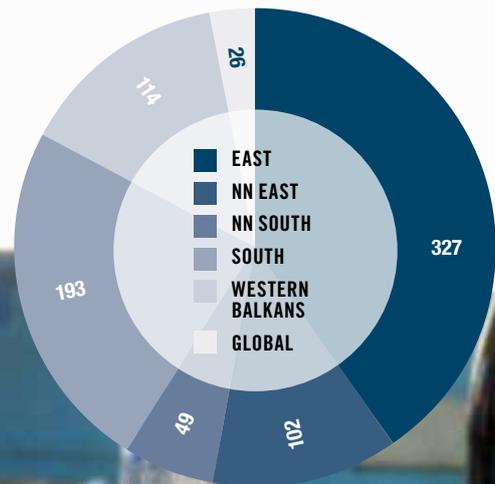
- 145  New funded initiatives
- 811  Requests for support
- 12  Emergency support granted
- 85  Monitoring and outreach missions
- 25  core staff from 17 countries
- 400,000+  Website unique visitors
- 70  Media mentions/interviews
- 57,500+  Facebook
- 2,700+  Twitter
- 28  Events

## PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT BY REGION (TOTAL)  
Total 5,033



REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT BY REGION (RECEIVED IN 2018)  
Total 811

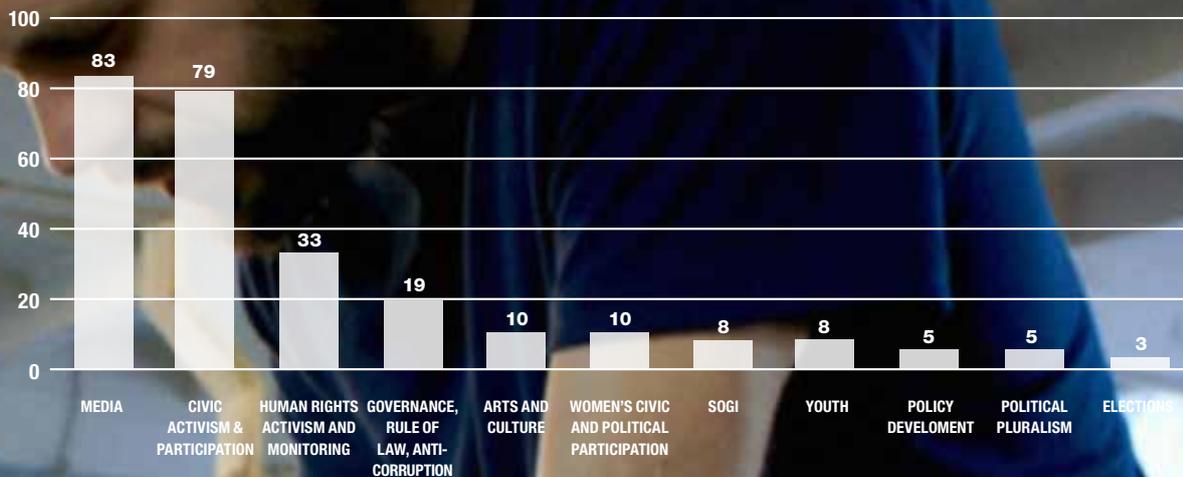


Explanatory note:  
 South: "Southern neighbourhood" i.e. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)  
 East: "Eastern neighbourhood" i.e. Eastern Partnership countries (EaP)  
 NN: "Neighbours of the neighbours" i.e. countries adjacent to the European neighbourhood region

# 1. OVERVIEW

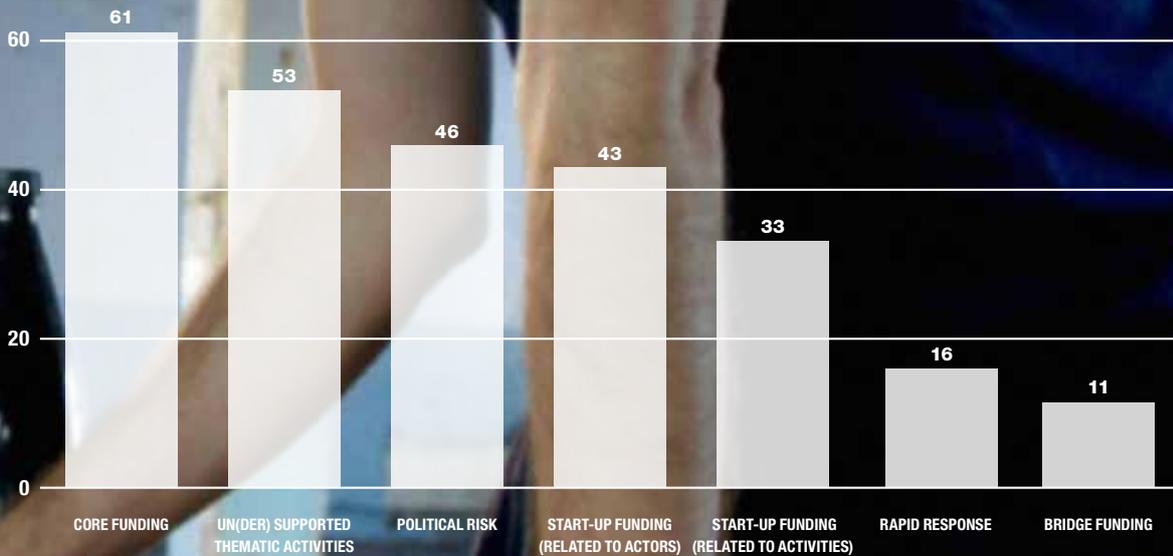
## NO. OF INITIATIVES BY THEMATIC AREA (ONGOING IN 2018)

Total **353**



## NO. OF INITIATIVES BY VALUE ADDED (ONGOING IN 2018)

Total **353**



**Explanatory note:** The purpose of EED – and the reason it was established – is to “add value” to existing European mechanisms of support to pro-democracy actors and initiatives. To be able to monitor trends and progress related to this indicator, EED identifies one “added value” for each grant that is most relevant to each specific initiative as part of the monitoring process.

SOGI – sexual orientation and gender identity

# 1.2 2018 PEOPLE OF THE YEAR

In 2018, several of our grantees and partners were recognised for their contributions to democracy and human rights. Here is a selection of their achievements. We note that many of our partners work in sensitive and repressive environments, and their important contributions and achievements cannot be mentioned here.



### **NATALIA MORARI MOLDOVA**

Natalia Morari, a journalist for the EED-supported media outlet TV8.md, was awarded the EaP CSF Pavel Sheremet Journalism Award at the 10th Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.



### **EYAD AL-OLAIMAT JORDAN**

Eyad Al-Olaimat, founder and director of the ALWASET for Community Awareness and Development (ACAD), which ran the EED-supported Entikhabate initiative to enhance citizen involvement in political life by raising political awareness among citizens, was selected as a 2018 democracy fellow for the UN Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals.



### **NANA TAKVARELIA GEORGIA**

Nana Takvarelia, contributor to EED partner OC Media, won the European Union in Georgia EU Prize for Journalism 2018 in the category for best online or print blog, opinion or column in print or online media, for an article on malnutrition in Georgia.



### **HUMAN RIGHTS POWER ARMENIA**

This NGO was awarded a "Golden Key" by the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia for fostering transparency of the judiciary.



### **ALEPPO MEDIA CENTER SYRIA**

The Aleppo Media Center, set up by citizen journalists to provide independent coverage of the war-torn country, was nominated for an Oscar for its documentary movie Last Men in Aleppo. The documentary shows the daily life of rescue workers from the White Helmets helping their fellow citizens in the city of Aleppo.



### **AL HUDOOD / JORDAN**

Pan-Arab political satire news site Al Hudood was awarded the prestigious One World Media Special Award. EED has supported Al Hudood since it was set up in 2014.

## 1. OVERVIEW

### **TVOE MISTO UKRAINE**

Tvoe Misto (Your City) was one of four new organisations selected to the Engaged Journalism Accelerator programme run by the European Journalism Centre (EJC) in Cardiff, UK. As part of the award, Tvoe Misto will receive a grant for developing the organisation and its work, receive mentoring from the EJC, and participate in joint EJC events in various European countries.

### **LEYLA AND ARIF YUNUS AZERBAIJAN**

The long-awaited book *From a Soviet Labour Camp to an Azeri Prison*, by renowned activists Leyla and Arif Yunus, was published in Russian by the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe. An EED-supported project, the book tells the story of Leyla and Arif's uncompromising fight for human rights in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. An English-language version of the publication is being prepared.



### **RESTART STUDENT INITIATIVE / ARMENIA**

Davit Petrosyan of the Restart Student Initiative was the recipient of the first ever EaP CSF Civil Society Activist Award at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. The Restart Student Initiative was also awarded the prestigious Amalya Kostanyan Prize for its principled and courageous work and significant contribution to the development of civil society. The Restart Student Initiative brings together active students from universities across Armenia who want to achieve a meaningful change in the field of higher education.



### **TAMARA CHERGOLEISHVILI GEORGIA**

Tamara Chergoleishvili, a journalist from EED-supported Tabula, one of the leading media organisations in Georgia, was invited to speak at the 2018 Women in the World Summit in New York. Tamara participated on the panel moderated by former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, debating the rise of strongmen regimes.



# 1.3 EVENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

**Events and collaboration with partners help us to promote our work and that of our grantees, highlight current issues of concern in the countries where we work, and serve as a forum to discuss innovative ideas in democracy support.**

Throughout 2018, through a busy programme of events, EED continued to act as a hub – “Democracy House” – for inspiring discussion and debate, sustaining and enhancing its reputation as a complementary and effective partner for the democracy support community of practice, which operates in the countries of the European neighbourhood.

### DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

As an active host and regular partner in democracy support forums, EED is well placed to serve as a neutral broker that builds synergies between existing donors, civil society organisations, think tanks, and international, national and regional organisations active in the field of democracy assistance.

Through our events, we build on existing partnerships and create opportunities for developing new collaborations. In 2018, these efforts resulted in almost 30 discussions organised. Joint conferences were co-created with both well-established and new partners, including Democracy Reporting International, People

in Need, Chatham House, UNESCO, and many others, on topics such as media freedom, election monitoring, and civil society resilience.

For the third year running, EED was co-ordinating partner of the International Day of Democracy, hosted by the European Parliament on 18 September 2018. The event was co-organised with three other democracy support organisations – the European Network of Political Foundations, European Partnership for Democracy, and the Office of the International Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) to the EU – as well as the European External Action Service and the European Commission.

EED continued its partnership with the Global Media Forum organised by Deutsche Welle; the Warsaw Security Forum, an initiative of the Casimir Pulaski Foundation; Difference Day, organised by a consortium headed by the Free University of Brussels and UNESCO; and the Warsaw Dialogue for Democracy, hosted annually by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This year has also seen the launch of new collaborations, with EED teaming up with People in Need for One World, the world’s largest human rights film festival. EED hosted two screenings and debates within the framework of the Brussels edition of the

## 2018 EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

27 FEBRUARY

**Ukraine Lab,  
Brussels**

6 MARCH

**Albania’s  
New Political  
Activism,  
Brussels**

23 APRIL

**Addressing  
challenges  
of refugees  
in Lebanon,  
Brussels**

3 MAY

**Difference  
Day,  
Brussels**



# 1. OVERVIEW

festival, as well as sitting on the jury selecting the best film of 2018. EED also joined YO!Fest at the European Youth Event in Strasbourg, providing a new visibility avenue for EED-supported youth initiatives.

EED regularly participates in donor co-ordination meetings with embassies and international organisations. Beyond the larger co-ordination meetings, EED is in regular contact with donors in all countries where it operates, ensuring active exchange and synergies.

## SHOWCASING OUR WORK

Partners and grantees are regularly invited to promote their initiatives and share their local insights on political and democratic developments at various events in EED, including smaller, closed expert debates, and at other forums facilitated by EED.

Many such events organised in 2018 have afforded partners a channel to “make their voices heard”, serving as an important advocacy platform for advancing messages and agendas, drawing visibility to initiatives, and offering a genuine grassroots response to the EU’s democracy support policies. They have also facilitated the exchange of good practices and experiences among democracy actors, and helped partners expand their networks and build capacity for the implementation of their initiatives.

Such forums enable EED, EU policymakers, and the wider expert community to keep abreast of the latest developments in democratic activism and realities on the ground in the diverse contexts in which they operate.

## SHARING EXPERTISE

Events also serve as an important vehicle in promoting the expertise and added value of EED. In 2018, EED continued to organise events aimed at stimulating political and expert debates in areas related to human rights and democracy. Due to the extension of EED’s mandate to the Western Balkans, 2018 also saw a number of events promoting EED as a new actor in the region.

EED’s Executive Director and staff members also regularly participated as speakers at international events such as the Bled Strategic Forum, the International Madrid Forum on Democracy, and the Western Balkans Media Days organised by the European Commission in Skopje.

Finally, to mark its fifth anniversary, EED held a conference at the European Parliament on 27 June 2018 for representatives of the EU institutions, member states, EED beneficiaries, and members of the democracy support community.

**1-2 JUNE**  
**Yo!Fest,  
Strasbourg**

**27 JUNE**  
**EED Fifth  
Anniversary,  
Brussels**

**10 SEPTEMBER**  
**Securing the  
revolution -  
the role of civil  
society and  
reform challenges  
in Armenia,  
Brussels**

**22-23 NOVEMBER**  
**Warsaw  
Dialogue for  
Democracy,  
Warsaw**



## 1. OVERVIEW



### EED CELEBRATES WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2018

For a second year in a row, EED joined the Free University of Brussels, UNESCO, and other partners in celebrating the UN World Press Freedom Day on 3 May at the Bozar Centre for Fine Arts. For the event, known as “Difference Day”, EED co-hosted a session “Voices of Resistance: Information Heroes around the Globe” that paid tribute to those journalists who risk their lives to ensure that citizens have access to plural information.

The debate featured a presentation of the new UNESCO report on the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development and tackled the daily struggle of journalists in the European Neighbourhood and beyond.

Jasmine Merei, a journalist and human rights activist, provided insights into citizen journalism in Syria, questioning the moral aspect of what can be presented, juxtaposed with reporting needs and accountability towards victims. Roman Dobrokhoto, Editor in Chief of The Insider, spoke about Russian journalists’ struggle with censorship and propaganda.

Moderating the session, Natalia Antelava, Editor-in-Chief of Coda Story, an EED-supported media outlet in Georgia, said “No story is worth being killed for. This poses additional questions on the safety of journalists today.”. Still, journalists risk their lives to ensure citizens have access to plural information, a fundamental pillar of modern democracies.

“We can’t leave the journalists alone to fight this battle”

Andrew Caruana Galizia, son of Daphne Caruana Galizia, a Maltese journalist murdered in 2017

## 1. OVERVIEW

### YOUNG ACTIVISTS FROM THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD ROCK THE STAGE AT YO!FEST

For the first time, the young leaders of EED partner initiatives had a chance to voice their cause at YO!Fest, at the European Youth Event, which brought together over 8,000 young people for debates at Europe's biggest youth political festival.

Our partners from Tilila (Morocco), GoEast (Ukraine), and Megaphone (Lebanon) stepped on stage on the second day of the festival, sharing the challenges they face in their daily work.

Speaking about their experiences in the contexts of war, post-conflict settings, or oppressive political regimes, they delivered strong messages on how they want to push for change, despite the personal risks.

Our speakers also emphasised the power of collective effort in the age of individuality. "The biggest challenge is not to create young leaders," said Svitlana Kolodii from GoEast. "It's all about teamwork. One person can't make big changes."

The festival also featured a workshop by Isam Uraiqtat from EED-supported Al Hudood (Jordan) on "How to run your own media outlet in a not-so-rosy environment", providing a behind-the-scenes view of media activism and ideas on how to keep up with the digital revolution and stay alive in restrictive, turbulent environments.

**“The key is connecting groups and learning from each other’s experience. There is a lot of potential and it’s a good moment to start mobilising. People should believe in change.”**

Jamal from the Lebanese media outlet Megaphone







## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

In this chapter, we describe EED's context-based approach, where our democracy support is tailored to the different legal and political realities of each country within which we work.

# 2.1 ADAPTING TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

**EED has been supporting activists and societies striving for democracy in the European neighbourhood since its establishment in 2013. Given the diverse range of countries in which it works, EED adopts a flexible and innovative approach, tailoring support to the different realities and challenges.**

Many societies in the EU's neighbourhood continue to confront profound challenges from violent conflicts, political instability, entrenched corruption, and economic woes. While 2018 saw democratic progress in some countries, in too many places democracy is in recession or has suffered serious setbacks.

Authoritarian rule has deepened and regimes are becoming increasingly strident in their attempts to cripple civil society and muzzle free speech. Ever more sophisticated disinformation campaigns seek to undermine democratic values and discredit those who stand up for them. EED works to support those who wish to keep the democratic struggle alive in these often disturbingly harsh environments.

### OUR APPROACH

EED and its grantees operate in four broad types of political environment: transitional, restrictive, authoritarian, and conflict situations.

### “UNCONVENTIONAL APPROACH TO SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY”

EED does not have a fixed vision of how to support democracy but rather is open to new and innovative ideas and responds in a dynamic way to requests for support. Its grantees come from all walks of life and many are new to activism. It has also given a lifeline to some organisations struggling to continue with their work in times of turmoil or when facing severe repression.

### “TAILOR-MADE, FLEXIBLE, AND TIMELY SUPPORT”

We adapt our support to respond to local realities. EED is demand-driven and flexible. It can support individuals and non-registered groups, and grant emergency funding requests, often within a few days. EED provided such emergency support in 12 cases in 2018 – for example, emergency support was provided to civil society activists in Armenia during the Velvet Revolution in the response to a fast-developing political situation.

### “INVESTING IN TRANSFORMATIONAL IDEAS”

EED seeks primarily to support groups and activists that are unable or without the capacity to access EU democracy support programmes, but with a guiding principle of investing in transformational ideas and the people behind them.

In this section, we take an in-depth look at the particular challenges of these different environments and EED's response, as well as at some of the inspiring people who have dedicated themselves to pushing for change.

# FEATURE | A Hidden Collective Revolutionising the Lebanese Media Landscape

**They choose to stay anonymous. A group of friends who have decided to get together to challenge the media landscape in Lebanon. Meet Megaphone, a “hidden collective” whose mission is to create space for a new discourse that defies the surrounding political and socioeconomic system.**

The picture of the media environment in Lebanon is painted in rather gloomy colours. A wide range of Lebanese media does not translate into a greater plurality of opinions, as most outlets are linked to political or sectarian actors. Journalists not only are exposed to immense pressure and censorship, but also worryingly often face actual threats and intimidation.

This status quo was unacceptable for a group of young activists. Engaged in various forms of civic action on the ground, they had been growing increasingly frustrated, as public discourse reflecting the voice of their generation was nowhere to be found.

“We felt alienated,” says Jean, a co-founder of Megaphone. “Most of the human rights issues and other polarising topics were being carefully avoided by mainstream media, and even some established civil society collectives. They were all afraid to go to places that might make them lose their popularity, such as the rights of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, migrant domestic workers, or LGBTQ people.”

Megaphone is an EED-supported online media channel that analyses, comments on, and explains local news. It promotes critical, professional, and fact-based journalism. The flashy colours, snap videos and thought-provoking commentary touching upon controversial issues make it stand out from the crowd.

The Megaphoners say that audiences need more nuanced and informed political alternatives, which media should be able to promote freely. The young outlet was widely praised for its 2018 election coverage, providing space for alternative politicians who were not granted a single spot in the mainstream channels.

Megaphone successfully wears a double hat of activism and journalism. “We have an agenda,” they admit. “Our agenda is promoting equality of rights, social justice, and civil liberties for both citizens and non-citizens in Lebanon, and holding the establishment accountable.”

Looking to the next steps, the biggest challenge is creating a business model on the road to sustainability. They are convinced their unique approach – research plus creativity – will allow them to do so.

Despite the obstacles, they are determined to go forward and fight for the ideals they believe in. “This is our coping mechanism – we resist a reality that does not resemble us by creating our own.”

“We noticed that mainstream media didn’t speak our language, that our narratives remained untold”

Jamal, co-founder of Megaphone

# 2.2 TRANSITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

**Some countries provide a generally non-restrictive environment, where civil society can operate in relative freedom without any direct repression or limits to its activities. However, despite the fact that EED grantees and donors can operate openly, significant weaknesses remain.**

Transitional environments are characterised by the fragility of their institutions, weighed down by weak governance and a lack of democratic accountability, an underdeveloped political culture, and barriers to political participation. Societies continue to struggle with corruption, weak rule of law, and infringements on media freedom. This leaves space for worrying trends such as the recent spate of threats and attacks against civil society activists and journalists in Ukraine.

2018 saw significant political change in Armenia as a result of the Velvet Revolution and fall of the Sargsyan regime. While continuing to follow developments on the ground closely and being watchful for potential backsliding, EED nonetheless recognises a significant opening of the democratic space in the country.

### OUR APPROACH

- In these environments, EED has played a vanguard role in supporting fledgling civil society organisations or pro-democracy actors otherwise ineligible for financing from EU financial instruments or other donor schemes.
- EED also provides core costs for organisations to move on to the phase of consolidating their development.

### ON THE GROUND

> In **Armenia**, EED provided funding to the Restart students initiative – an unregistered grassroots initiative – so that they could continue to channel the energy of young people into bringing about reform in universities and the education sector. (See **case study** on pages 27-29 for further information on EED's contribution to strengthening civil society prior to the revolution.)

> In **Georgia**, EED has provided support to the social media group **Squander Detectors**, which monitors and analyses public spending, uncovering cases of corruption and malpractice. It communicates its findings through creative videos, which are shared widely and are frequently highlighted by national media. The group has published findings on a wide range of issues such as municipal spending, infrastructure projects, and state tenders.

EED has continued to support **Tabula**, one of Georgia's leading online media organisations. Tabula enjoys a strong online and social media audience, with more than 1.5m unique visitors, a significant number for Georgia's 3.7m population. EED's support has signalled confidence in this media outlet, which has subsequently begun to receive some advertising revenues and donor funding.

> In **Ukraine**, EED has supported the **Secretariat of the Civic Oversight Council** of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), a state law enforcement agency specialising in investigating corruption-related offences committed by high-level officials authorised to perform functions of the state or local government. Before receiving EED support, the Civic Oversight Council (COC) operated for two years entirely on a volunteer basis while working on a wide range of demanding tasks linked to overseeing NABU's work. With the EED grant, COC is able to operate a secretariat and perform its function, while contributing to Ukraine's anti-corruption reforms at the national and regional levels.

> In **Tunisia**, EED provided support to **Rami Khouili**, a prominent human rights activist, to publish and disseminate a research project on Article 230 and the history of the criminalisation of homosexuality in the country. The dissemination of its findings is timely, as the community fighting for rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in Tunisia mount a concerted advocacy effort to repeal Article 230.

# CASE STUDY | A new start for democracy in Armenia?

**In an unexpected leap forward for democracy, 2018 saw Armenians exercise their right to demand change – and make an important first step to achieving their goal of deeper democracy.**

In April 2018, a wave of peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience swept Armenia, culminating in the resignation of long-term leader Serzh Sargsyan and the election of opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan as the new prime minister, elected through free and fair elections. The protests differed from others that had taken place in Armenia due to a lack of a geopolitical agenda. These were domestic protests by local actors motivated by long-standing domestic grievances.

From EED's point of view, not only was the outcome of the Velvet Revolution remarkable, but also the process itself. Two points in particular stand out.

First, civic movements — which included members of both formal and informal groups — and a political opposition party managed to bridge the deep divide between Armenia's civic and political arenas, and work together to achieve a common goal.

Second, round-the-clock coverage by independent media and social networks played a big role in keeping people updated, bringing people to the streets, and even acting as a human rights defence mechanism in the early days: live-streaming helped hold the government to account.

Before April 2018, few would have believed that the Armenian people could have succeeded in demanding change, for various reasons, including the perception of Armenia as Russia's backyard, a weak political opposition, and general apathy towards political processes. What mattered in the end was that there were still those who refused to give up. These groups, from different generations, kept stubbornly protesting throughout the years, experiencing many failures, but acquiring along the way organisational skills and ideas for creative, non-violent protests around an idea that people could unite.

The developments in Armenia are a vivid illustration of how democratisation processes are unpredictable, non-linear, and long-term in nature, and how — even if immediate results are not always evident — supporting pro-democracy activists and a country's democratic infrastructure may prove to be effective over time. In contrast, while the unpredictability and long-term nature of democratisation is widely acknowledged, democracy assistance is often short term in nature and focused on achieving results in the short- and intermediate-term. Several EED grants that seemed not to have a significant short-term effect contributed to strengthening the capacity of activists and democratic infrastructure that was important for the revolution.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH



**Davit Petrosyan** – Who co-founded the Restart Student Initiative.

“We made a historical change – but we need to keep working and live up to our expectations of the revolution.”



**Lilit Martirosyan** – Right Side NGO, a transgender woman and founder of Armenia's first transgender organisation.

“Even though trans people were actively involved in the revolution, the post-revolutionary policy of Armenia is targeted against trans people by political and religious leaders to gain political dividends. There are many reforms to do, including the removal of forced sterilisation, adoption of anti-discrimination, hate crime, and hate speech legislation.”

### EED SUPPORT IN ARMENIA

#### HOW

EED has worked in Armenia since 2013. This was an important time to start engaging in the country as it coincided with a rise in civic activism. One of EED's advantages is that, being based abroad, it has the flexibility to fund more sensitive, political initiatives that donors inside the country cannot. Often, EED has mobilised this support at very short notice under the emergency procedure – another advantage of EED's model. A third advantage is that EED works with local consultants who are able to identify emerging, grassroots actors, and can accompany them through the process of developing a project and support them in its implementation.

Since 2013, 55 grants have been awarded to initiatives in Armenia, with a value of around €2.3 million. Around

40 percent of the initiatives have been emergency initiatives, where EED has quickly responded to fast-moving political developments. This demonstrates two things: the volatility of the environment, as well as the lack of alternative funding sources to support key independent media and human rights organisations, so that they can respond to such developments.

#### WHAT

The 55 supported initiatives have ranged from the Citizen Observer Initiative ahead of the 2015 referendum to mobilise 1,000 volunteers, to core support to Right Side NGO, the first transgender community in Armenia, to Logos in Gyumri, a grassroots initiative working with local youth to increase understanding about local governance, to Journalists for Human Rights, which shines a light on human rights in closed institutions, to GALA TV, a Gyumri-based independent TV station.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH



**Laura Baghdasyryan** – Region Research Development Centre, which monitored political parties' use of social media and coverage of political parties by key media outlets during the 2017 parliamentary elections.

“Several experienced political parties have remained outside parliament, new parties have been created, and Pashinyan’s party still needs to institutionalise itself as a political force. In short, it’s important for Armenia’s party system to strengthen and also for a law on parties to be adopted.”



**Karine Harutyunian** – chief editor at GALA TV, an independent media station in the Shirak region.

“The situation is still fragile. The media reflects what is happening in the country. Journalists were spoiled, they aren’t used to this situation — they are still always looking for someone to please. If the media does its job properly, the government does its job too.”



**Sevak Mamyon** – InfoCom, Armenia’s first media aggregator, which started life as a Telegram channel shortly before the revolution.

“The influence of traditional media has decreased, Facebook is more popular, but online the amount of fake news and manipulations has risen. The main issue is Facebook pages and blogs whose ownership is unknown. We need to increase media literacy, but also to increase the audiences of reliable news outlets.”

Two themes emerge from EED’s support in Armenia as being key for transformational change: first, efforts to connect civic and political activists. One noteworthy initiative was No Pasaran, a group that aimed to raise awareness about what was behind the 2015 snap constitutional referendum on transforming Armenia into a parliamentary republic. Several members of this group later formed the core of the #RejectSerzh initiative, some going on to take key governmental positions.

Second, initiatives that communicated key messages in creative forms, ranging from satirical YouTube shows, to art classes and exhibitions in Armenia’s regions, to political cartoons that often went viral but were also spread via traditional newspapers distributed in Armenia’s regions. These all helped to challenge the status quo in an entertaining, thought-provoking way, removing the barrier of fear.

### WHAT NOW?

The events of 2018 are just the start of democratic reform. For now, civil society grapples with a number of challenges, ranging from the need for balanced, content-focused political discourse on reforms in several areas, including media, education, and the judiciary, in an increasingly tense atmosphere with higher levels of hate speech that often comes from anonymous sources. And while certain changes may have taken place politically, the trickier issue of helping to change the mindsets of fellow citizens who have long lived under a corrupt, semi-authoritarian regime remains a major challenge. While the situation is often complex, many activists maintain a healthy sense of optimism and deep commitment to the goals that they set out to achieve — not only through the 2018 Velvet Revolution, but through many years of civic and political activism before society finally succeeded in bringing about change.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

FEATURE #FirstPersonStory:  
Roman Maselko (Ukraine)

# A Ukrainian lawyer's fight for the rule of law

**Ukrainian lawyer Roman Maselko swapped a high-flying corporate career to fight against corruption, find justice for those who lost their lives in the Euromaidan protests, and provide civil oversight of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine.**

Before the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine, Roman Maselko had a successful career as the head of the legal department at an international bank in Ukraine. It was a well-paid and prestigious job that most young lawyers in Ukraine could only dream of. But one day in late 2013 he came across the protests on the Maidan against the government's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU and everything changed.

"When I was on my way back home I found myself in the midst of the first skirmish with the Berkut riot police. People were encircled and were being pushed back, and then the police started beating people with truncheons. I got hit in the head for no reason, since none of us were offering any resistance. They were beating us just to make us scared."

"Then it struck me that this was the end of my cosy world that I had been building until then. It was no longer possible to lead an isolated and successful life. Even if you do nothing illegal and remain apolitical,

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

**“When an innocent person was declared guilty, it was a real shock for me. It was worse than being hit in the head with a truncheons.”**

law enforcers can just beat you up on your way home and get away with it. So I made a decision to fight the system which was violating our rights.”

It was the beginning of what would become a long and active engagement in civil society for Maselko, who is now one of Ukraine’s most well-known activists.

### DRIVE AGAINST CORRUPTION

As mass protests broke out in the country, one of his first actions was to join AutoMaidan, a new civic movement that organised car rallies, including outside the residence of President Viktor Yanukovich to protest against his lavish and ill-gotten possessions, and which later received support from EED for anti-corruption activism. Ironically, Maselko doesn’t have a driver’s licence; instead, he used his legal skills to defend those whose licences were unlawfully revoked for participating in these protests. Then the Maidan became a scene of carnage. Bullets flew in downtown Kyiv and dozens of people were killed. Maselko saw people being killed before his own eyes.

It was then that he made a pledge to himself to seek justice for the victims – known as the Heavenly Hundred. For the past five years since those events, Maselko has been one of a group of volunteer lawyers representing the victims’ families as they pursue the perpetrators through the courts.

### JUDGMENT FOR JUDGES

Maselko realises, however, that in order to hope for justice from the courts, they need to be free of corruption too. He has been dogged in his exposure of judges who convicted innocent protesters, resulting in the dismissal of a significant number of them.

“When during the Euromaidan events I faced judicial outrage, when an innocent person was declared guilty, it was a real shock for me. It was worse than being hit in the head with a truncheon,” he says.

“Even now, courts issue arbitrary rulings protecting influential powers-that-be. Judges are often engaged

to legalise shadowy schemes.” The level of Ukrainians’ trust in the judiciary is one of the lowest among all public authorities, and that needs to change. That’s why Maselko is also a member of the Public Integrity Council, a civic oversight body for judicial reform, which among things carries out checks on the sources of judges’ wealth.

### RESISTING PRESSURE

Despite the challenges, there has been some progress. “One can also see examples of fair justice in courts now,” Maselko says. There is also the example of Larysa Holnyk, a judge from Poltava who exposed an attempt by the city’s mayor to bribe her – although later attacks on her and her husband show how risky it still is to stand up to corruption in Ukraine. Maselko himself has also faced a reprimand from the Lviv Bar Association for a breach of ethics for a post he made on Facebook – an event he interprets as a warning against the work he carries out.

However, Maselko is undeterred. Wiping out systemic corruption is challenging and requires constant vigilance and oversight, which he is determined should happen. The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) is tasked with investigating cases of corruption among public officials, but in order to ensure it does its job properly, a Civic Oversight Council has been set up by a group of activists – including Maselko, who has twice served as its head. The council acts as a watchdog, especially by monitoring investigations of controversial cases. For the first two years, the council operated entirely on a voluntary basis. However, thanks to a grant from EED, a Secretariat has now been set up to provide administrative support to the council and enable it to function more efficiently. Maselko may have given up a comfortable life in his pursuit of justice, but he thinks that if Ukraine is really to change for the better, it is necessary for more people like him to get involved.

“Changes will speed up when socially minded people start working in public agencies, occupy relevant positions, and defend the principles of the creation of a modern European society in Ukraine,” he says.

# 2.3 RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

**Many EED grantees work in restrictive environments with an increasingly limited space for civil society. There are growing restrictions on those seeking democratic progress, and on donors who provide support to civil society, even in political systems that are not entirely authoritarian.**

While there is often some level of open pluralism in governance, pressure on opposition parties and candidates is common. In such environments, elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being genuinely democratic. Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law weak. Some governments have taken steps to curtail independent civil society within their countries. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists and the judiciary is not independent. Restrictions can also result from cultural factors, such as traditional views held by society.

In such contexts, EED grantees and other activists often face a powerful patronage system that links political power-holders and economic interests, and squeezes civil society and other independent actors out of the decision-making process. Often, media falls victim to this control over power, as the government and the businesses that support pro-regime media curtail freedom of expression.

### OUR APPROACH

- EED engages in such restrictive environments by building capacities of citizens and supporting independent voices.
- EED supports initiatives that build foundations for a more inclusive and participatory democracy, and work to counter corruption.

- EED adds value by funding new activists and other groups with limited or no access to other donor funding – whether due to restrictive legal environments, government repression, security concerns, or political sensitivities.

### ON THE GROUND

- > In **Moldova**, EED gave emergency support to key independent and opposition television and press hubs, such as **TV8** and **Jurnal TV**, enabling them to survive despite intensified pressure from authorities, including advertising bans, fines, eviction from premises, and pressure on business partners.
- > In **Morocco**, EED seed funding helped the **Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis** get off to a strong start. It has already published a number of papers and been mentioned in a range of international and Arab media.

Pushing against the shrinking space for open and critical discussion, the first edition of the cultural and political festival **Kamleen** was held in Rabat in October 2018, with EED support, bringing together civil society actors and pro-democracy actors.

- > In **Turkey**, EED has continued to support independent media outlets operating in an increasingly restricted space. It has also supported platforms such as **Teyit.org**, a fact-checking organisation, and **Bir+Bir Forum**, which brings together journalists and civil society actors in an online forum for debate and exchange of best practices and toolkits.

EED also supported election-monitoring activities for the April snap presidential and June parliamentary elections.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH



A meeting at Turkish fact-checking organisation Teyit.org  
© Teyit.org

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

FEATURE #FirstPersonStory:  
Yaman Akdeniz (Turkey)

# Turkish lawyer battles through the courts to protect freedom of expression

An internet and human rights law professor is using the legal system to fight against internet blocking and politically motivated freedom of expression cases in Turkey.

When we finally manage to catch up on the phone, Yaman Akdeniz, a law professor from Turkey, is apologetic. He has spent the day running around Istanbul visiting potential offices for his new NGO, but so far to no avail. “Landlords in Turkey don’t like renting to associations,” he explains. “Firstly, they are scared of our name – the Freedom of Expression Association – and secondly, associations have a bad reputation for not paying the rent.”

Although media have long faced problems in Turkey, perhaps surprisingly Akdeniz’s expertise in the subject came out of his 16 years in the UK, where he completed his studies and embarked on an academic career, progressing to Senior Lecturer at Leeds University.

Becoming a leading authority on online freedom of expression, he appeared as an expert before a select committee inquiry at the House of Commons back in 1999 about the UK Government’s proposals on its encryption policy, in his capacity as the director of Cyber-Rights.Org, his first NGO, which he set up in the UK.

His expertise has since been sought by various international organisations, including the European Parliament, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) Office, and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

It was a mid-life crisis, he jokes, that brought him back to Turkey in 2009, aged 41, where he resumed his academic career as a professor of law at Istanbul Bilgi University and quickly become involved in litigation in cases of internet blocking. His first case, which he took all the way to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) – albeit unsuccessfully – concerned the blocking of access to MySpace and Last.fm. This was followed by many other cases for people whose websites had been blocked – including renowned evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.

His appeal to the Turkish Constitutional Court together with his colleague Kerem Altıparmak overturned the blocking of access to Twitter in April 2014 and to YouTube in May 2014. In December 2015, Akdeniz and his colleagues won an application at the European Court of Human Rights level on the blocking of access to YouTube from Turkey between 2008 and 2010. For their efforts in the YouTube case, the pair received the prestigious Columbia University Global Freedom of Expression Award in 2016.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

Over the past five years, through a project at his university, Akdeniz and Altiparmak have taken on more than 300 cases. Around half of these cases are internet blocking cases and the other half are defending individuals who are facing criminal charges for defamation of the president of Turkey or public officials and authorities, terrorism propaganda-related charges, as well as four cases of journalists arrested in the wake of the coup attempt who are facing terrorism-related charges. Akdeniz and Altiparmak regard all these as political speech cases.

When the pair decided it was time to launch a dedicated NGO, EED was the first to provide funding. A grant was awarded to cover core operational costs in the initial phase while they seek other donor support – something that is not easy to find for this area of work, especially from within Turkey, says Akdeniz.

### IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

It's a long-term project – taking such cases through the courts and appeals processes in Turkey typically takes three to four years, with another five-year wait if it goes as far as the ECtHR. That's one of the reasons that Akdeniz and Altiparmak are mentoring younger lawyers through internships. "We can't carry this forever ourselves – we need young blood," he says.

With academics and media increasingly targeted by a government purge since the 2016 failed coup attempt, this could be seen as a dangerous line of work. "There's always that risk," says Akdeniz. "But we do everything by the law. We don't do much in the way of activism." It's an important distinction: Akdeniz points out that in recent decades there has been a shift away from the murder and torture of journalists, which was frequent in the 1980s and 1990s, towards attempts by the authorities to hamper opposition media within the

limits of the law. In a sense, he is playing them at their own game, relentlessly challenging each decision.

And the numbers speak for themselves. Between 2015 and 2017 there were some 60,000 criminal investigations and over 12,000 prosecutions just for defaming the president of Turkey, as well as over 612,000 investigations for membership of terror organisations since the failed coup attempt. More than 220,000 websites and 150,000 URLs are currently blocked in Turkey including Wikipedia since April 2017, for which the pair also lodged an application with the Constitutional Court.

### WRITING HISTORY

"I'm not very optimistic about the situation in Turkey, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't fight," says Akdeniz. "We are not doing this to win; we are writing a part of history. The facts will be there, what was blocked, by whom, who was prosecuted for what. We are trying to document key violations for freedom of expression by way of litigation."

And each case that they take on, each appeal that is denied, each decision that is overturned, and each ruling of a higher court in their favour calls attention to the current situation of freedom of expression in Turkey.

Two days earlier, Akdeniz had been interviewed for the position of the Turkish judge on the ECtHR. The post has been vacant for the past two years and Turkey's own nominations have been rejected three times so far. "I apply every time," he says. He doesn't expect to be nominated by the government, but sees this as a way of keeping up the pressure on the government. "I openly speak about the process," he says. "I tweet about it." Something apparently no other candidate is willing to do.

**“We are not doing this to win; we are writing a part of history. The facts will be there, what was blocked, by whom, who was prosecuted for what. We are trying to document key violations for freedom of expression by way of litigation.”**

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

# 2.4 REPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

**Around a third of the countries in which EED works have openly repressive regimes. Governments do not allow or actively obstruct civil society from engaging in political processes.**

Authoritarian political elites bolster their rule by imprisoning and, in some cases, torturing opponents, restricting the media and civil society, harassing activists, limiting popular freedoms, and repressing protest.

Authoritarian regimes do not allow any political pluralism, and elections are not free and fair. Civic and political activists take a high risk by engaging in pro-democracy work and risk imprisonment or other punishment for their work, and the regimes generally disregard civil liberties. Media are typically fully controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. There is repression of criticism of the government, and pervasive censorship and no independent judiciary.

Legal restrictions are not the only way to limit civil society assistance and stymie the work of NGOs receiving such aid. Governments engaged in pushback also work to create a political climate in which recipients of foreign funding are intimidated and publicly delegitimised. Most donors either have been blacklisted or are blocked from entering these countries by administrative and legal constraints.

Governmental campaigns to obstruct or limit foreign support for domestic NGOs are often part of a larger crackdown on independent civil society and a broader shrinking of political space for activism and dissent.

### OUR APPROACH

- An important part of EED's mandate is to provide flexible support to activists who operate in such difficult environments. EED has actively adapted to deteriorating conditions and harsh restrictions by finding new ways to continue effectively supporting civil society.
- EED adapts to the distinctive needs of activists who operate in such difficult environments, including protecting their identity where required and providing the support in a discreet and safe manner.
- In a small number of cases, when it is extremely challenging for civil society to operate inside a particular country, EED provides support to initiatives in exile. However, most of these groups still have strong networks inside the country and are able to conduct activities inside it, and EED encourages these initiatives to continue to maintain a circle of partners inside their home country, to work directly with citizens on the ground.

### ON THE GROUND

- > In countries where the environment for activists is extremely repressive, such as **Azerbaijan** or **Egypt**, outright success stories are sometimes harder to pinpoint. Rather, the success is that EED funding contributes to sustaining key civil society actors, media, and human rights defenders where few other donors are present – for example, initiatives enabling human rights actors to systemically and professionally document human rights abuses, and support for networks of lawyers working collectively to provide legal support to human rights defenders.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

MEYDANDA  
OLMASAZ DA,  
MEYDANDA  
QALIN!

# FEATURE | How fabricated complaints on YouTube and Facebook are silencing independent media

**In repressive environments, opposition voices are increasingly reliant on the online world and social media to exist. However, a recent case involving Meydan TV suggests that authoritarian regimes are embarking on a disguised battle against online dissent.**

On 28 December 2017, 11 videos were blocked on the YouTube channel of Meydan TV, one of the few remaining independent Azerbaijani media outlets, working from exile in Berlin. These video reports, which highlighted allegations of official corruption, generated an onslaught of complaints and were removed on the grounds that they infringed YouTube's copyright rules. YouTube took down the videos without doing any serious checks of their content and the alleged violations.

Given the fact that Meydan TV's website, along with four others, was blocked following a 2016 ruling, the outlet is now increasingly reliant on YouTube to keep its voice present online. Meydan TV quickly identified the source of the complaints: a company called Muse Network abused its partnership status with YouTube and filed false complaints of copyright violations. As revealed by Coda Story, the company, which is based in Turkey but has an office in Baku, is notorious for filing fabricated complaints about Azeri independent outlets on YouTube.

Muse Network was responsible for a similar incident involving the Azeri service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which in the beginning of January had one video report about SOCAR (the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan) removed from YouTube for alleged copyright violation.

In both cases, the Azerbaijan Director of the company denied the accusations. The incident with Meydan TV "was not an isolated case", according to Emin Milli, Director of Meydan TV. "Corrupt officials are using such companies as proxies to target independent media and independent voices by using YouTube as a tool."

Complaints on YouTube can easily be overlooked or go unchallenged. However, under YouTube's policies, after three violations, a channel can be blocked for good. According to Milli, "the claims are made generally, it's not clear what rules you're accused of violating or at what point. This lack of transparency makes dispute resolution arbitrary."

Online sharing platforms and social media are harder for governments to control than traditional press. However, it seems that authoritarian governments are no longer inclined to tolerate any dissent, whether offline or online.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH



### **ENSORSHIP IN THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING BLOGOSPHERE**

Azerbaijan is not alone in its efforts to achieve internet censorship through temporary disruption and blocking of social media accounts. Similar techniques are also widespread in the Russian-language online media sphere.

Since 2014, several prominent Belarusian and Ukrainian accounts critical of the Kremlin have been suspended on Facebook, following multiple (automated/bot) complaints and false reports of abuse filed from Russia.

In some cases, the complaints were filed against posts dismantling Soviet-era false myths, a recurrent theme of disinformation efforts. Moldova is using the same mechanism internally, to target YouTube channels of opposition leaders.

While Facebook and YouTube deal with complaints, the accounts of targeted bloggers, activists, and opposition leaders remain suspended. Even a few hours of disruption can drive audiences away from blocked channels.

### **A DISGUISED WAR ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ONLINE**

In light of the above, the increasingly repressive internet-related legislations adopted by some post-Soviet countries – such as the regulatory measures introduced by the Azerbaijani government in 2016, or the bill on “bloggers-foreign agents” approved in the first reading by the Russian State Duma on 12 January – are only the most visible tools to silence online opposition.

Restricting access to online information through arbitrary disruption and blocking of social media accounts represent a serious violation of the right to freedom of expression online – as recognised in 2016 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. The UN resolution condemned unequivocally measures to “intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or dissemination of information in violation of international human rights law”.

So far, international resolutions have not been effective in tackling this phenomenon. So how can activists and independent media working in repressive environments challenge it?

### **IS A “PROTECTIVE MECHANISM” CONCEIVABLE?**

In his complaint letter to YouTube, Milli recommended that the site put in place a “protection mechanism for independent voices and media in authoritarian countries”. According to Milli, this would make harder to “delete videos and channels of reliable sources of information based on fabricated complaints, without any grounding”.

But, as long as the big online platforms are driven by commercial and power principles, implementing such mechanisms would be challenging.

In the case of Meydan TV, after international journalists contacted the Head of Muse Network, the videos on YouTube were restored. However, pressure from journalists and the international community is only a reactive mechanism. The threat for Meydan TV and other similar channels remains.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH

# THE CONTENT FUND | Providing Russian-language non-news media content

**The Content Fund is a unique mechanism for granting support to broadcasters and digital platforms for the production and acquisition of distinctive, entertaining, and informative Russian-language non-news TV and video content.**

This year saw further progress towards establishing the Content Fund as an independent funding mechanism. On 5 March 2018, EED hosted the presentation of the Content Fund to the donor and expert community. The mission and objectives of the fund were presented, taking stock of the work achieved and stressing the need for further support to counter disinformation with quality and balanced content.

Working with more than 30 partners in the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia, and beyond, the fund awarded 31 grants of some €1.9 million in 2018. As a result, more than 30 hours of creative content and 180 hours of international and Russian content were produced, all with a view to serving Russian-language audiences across the region.

The Fund facilitated production of Russian-language content in factual and entertainment formats, encompassing genres such as cooking, talent and children's TV shows, and factual and historical documentaries.

### PRODUCTION HIGHLIGHTS

> **The Taste of the Country** by UA:Pershyi (Ukraine) is a factual entertainment TV series of five films, reflecting the culture and hospitality of the Russian-speaking populations of countries in the Eastern Partnership and beyond.

> **The Stripper and the War** by Belsat TV (Belarus) is a documentary about the loving but tense relationship between a grandson, who works as a professional stripper in Minsk, and his grandfather, a former Lieutenant Colonel in the Soviet army, with whom he lived at a military camp near the city.

> **Coda Story** (Georgia) has produced a short non-fiction interactive graphic novel, pioneered on game engine technology and for use on a purpose-built app and the Coda Story website. It features the story of the arrest and imprisonment of a Russian electrical engineer from Tver whose posts on social media angered the Kremlin.

Since late 2016, the Content Fund has enjoyed support from the UK government, a key donor to the fund, with additional contributions from Finland, Poland, and Romania. This engagement takes place in parallel to EED support for other independent media outlets.



# 2.5 CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS

**In conflict zones, people push for democratic processes that are capable of addressing tensions and building foundations for peace.**

Supporting civil society in conflict environments brings particular challenges. Many donors are forced to close local offices and withdraw support due to security concerns and operational challenges, such as the inability to monitor projects or disburse funding.

In many countries, the level of political stability and security is simply not sufficient to operate activities in support of democracy. However, many activists show remarkable resilience and commitment to continue working for a better and more democratic society even in the midst of violence.

### OUR APPROACH

EED is committed to helping populations suffering war and instability. EED helps ensure that ordinary citizens' voices are heard and assists people who are trying to keep the democratic struggle alive, often in extremely harsh conditions. Many activists are trying to set the foundations for a more democratic future for their country when the conflict ends. Many are new to this kind of work and are inexperienced in dealing with donor funding, requiring additional support.

### ON THE GROUND

> EED saw an increase in demand for support from **Libya** in 2018, during a turbulent year for the country. Given the lack of experience of many emerging civil society organisations in managing donor grants, a flexible approach is needed. Among ten new grantees from the country was a nascent organisation dealing with transitional justice, which EED supported by first building the team's capacity and expertise before helping it to design and implement its first initiative.

> In **Syria**, the space for pro-democracy civil society has shrunk further after the Assad regime regained control of large parts of the country. In addition, there are increased challenges to Syrian civil society organisations operating out of neighbouring Turkey and Lebanon because of legal and operational restrictions. In this more complex environment, EED has renewed support to some grantees who are struggling to access alternative funding.

We continue to support independent media initiatives such as **Aleppo Media Center**, known for its documentary work on the humanitarian White Helmets, as well as outlets operating in areas where media freedom is highly restricted. EED has also supported **Syrians for Truth and Justice**, an organisation documenting not only conflict-related human rights violations but also human rights more broadly within Syrian society.



### IN MEMORIAM: RAED FARES 1972 – 2018

On 23 November 2018, Raed Fares, a leading Syrian activist, was shot dead in his hometown of Kafranbel, in Idlib province, alongside his friend and colleague Hammud Junayd. The founder of the pro-democracy Kafranbel initiative as well as the community radio station Fresh FM, Fares had been a prominent figure in the democratic movement in Syria since 2011, campaigning for education, democracy, women and children's rights and, most of all, an end to the bloodshed.

A critic of both the Assad regime and ISIS, Fares had been attacked several times before and had escaped previous assassination attempts. Despite the pressure from both extremists and the government, Fares remained tireless in his pursuit of a freer and more democratic Syria.

EED was part of the collective of organisations supporting the work of the Kafranbel initiative and worked closely with him on a number of projects. He is greatly missed.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH



# FEATURE | #Speaking up for marginalised refugees in Jordan

**A group of journalists and aid workers is helping improve the lives of Sudanese and other vulnerable refugees in Jordan.**

In late 2015, Dina Baslan, a Jordanian humanitarian worker and researcher on migration, learnt about a demonstration in front of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in Amman by refugees from Sudan. This relatively small group of refugees, who were socially excluded and often subject to racial discrimination, was calling for an improvement in their conditions and equal treatment to other refugee groups.

“Myself and other Jordanians thought, this is time for citizens to act,” says Dina, who began bringing them food and blankets, particularly for the children camped out in the cold November.

At the same time, Aaron Williams, an American journalist and long-time Middle East resident, found himself reporting on these events for the international media.

Jordan is a country that knows more than most about refugees. In addition to the two million registered Palestinian refugees, most of whom have full citizenship, well over half a million Syrians have sought asylum there. According to UNHCR, the country has the world’s second-highest share of refugees compared to its population, at 89 per 1,000 inhabitants.

It was therefore particularly shocking to Aaron that the conclusion to these events was the deportation of some 800 registered Sudanese refugees to Khartoum, where the government has long been at war with their native Darfur region.

What he found all the more disturbing about the deportations was that they were largely ignored by the international community. Despite his reports, including follow-up stories on the plight of the refugees once back in Sudan, there was little public outcry and few official statements condemning the action from international organisations and NGOs.

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH



Unable to prevent the deportations, Dina and Aaron turned their attention to the remaining Sudanese refugees. “In the post-deportation phase, personally as a Jordanian I felt we needed to take ownership in bringing different parts of Jordanian society to work with the international community to find a solution,” says Dina.

Realising that if they didn’t act, no one would, Aaron, Dina, and some other like-minded local and international aid workers who had met during these events, put together a community action group to support the Sudanese community. Through home visits they were able to identify and assess the needs of vulnerable refugees, create referral partnerships, and advocate on their behalf.

Their lobbying efforts paid off. They are now part of an informal co-ordination group of international NGOs advocating for Sudanese and other communities, and have been invited to present at UNHCR’s protection working group where issues that pertain to these communities were raised.

And whereas previously the focus had been largely on Syrian refugees, there has been a shift in interest from international donors such as the EU towards the plight of Sudanese, Somali, and Yemeni refugees, with some now requiring that project proposals also consider these refugees’ needs as part of grant applications.

After three years of working pro bono in what fast became a full-time occupation, Aaron and Dina registered Sawiyan (which means “to come together as equals” in Arabic) as an official non-profit in February 2018. Seed funding from EED was awarded propitiously on the same day as the Sawiyan website launched, providing vital funds for establishing the organisation.

Aaron says it’s hard to overstate the importance of EED’s model of fast processing of applications for new grassroots initiatives like Sawiyan: “There are a lot of great grants out there, but the process puts great people and great organisations and ideas off – they take too long and people can’t afford to wait.”

## 2. CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH



There have been bumps along the road – bureaucratic obstacles to registering office space as well as anti-terrorism measures that make it harder for non-profit organisations to open local bank accounts. But the successes, when they come, more than make up for the setbacks.

Sawiyān is now very much up and running and its projects are receiving increasing donor interest. Advocacy continues to be a strong component of Sawiyān's work and it also works closely with other organisations to provide emergency assistance and other services to those in need. Sawiyān's own projects cover education and professional skills development, community building and anti-discrimination awareness raising.

However, they are wary of growing too big too fast, wanting to maintain the close personal contact with the individual families, which they see as a defining feature of Sawiyān. In addition to its small core staff, Sawiyān works with around thirty volunteers, carefully

screened for their ability to connect at a human level with people of different cultures.

Building a sense of community is an important element of Sawiyān's work, and includes engaging the local community, both as volunteers and as beneficiaries of its projects. One successful initiative is the skateboarding programme, in collaboration with 7 Hills Skate park, where Jordanian volunteers are involved in teaching young Sudanese refugees but also disadvantaged Jordanians how to skateboard.

As well as providing some much-needed fun, the activity is a way of breaking down barriers between the different communities and promoting integration. Looking to the future, Aaron says they have many ideas for new projects but would need more capacity. In the meantime, there is plenty to be done consolidating the existing work: "Our main goal for now is to keep our head above water for the next two years and create better internal policies, better monitoring and evaluation, better projects and partnerships."

for ECONOMIC GROWTH

PUBLIC SERVICE

Guarantee INDEPENDENCE

UPHOLD the RULE of LAW

CONSTRUCTING atmosphere for Debate with CITIZENS

a PARTICULAR Duty for DIVERSITY and INCLUSION

I put TR in the WHITEHOUSE for CAS - so wha

MEDIA FREEDOM is a Fundamental for a REAL DEMOCRACY

# GOVERNMENT ROLE

Encouraging and Supporting

NEW BUSINESS

SUPPORTING

New Biz Models + Entrepreneurs



## MEDIA LITERACY



Over Simplification Encouraging and Creating Ethnic Divisions Discrediting Confuc

Counter with this

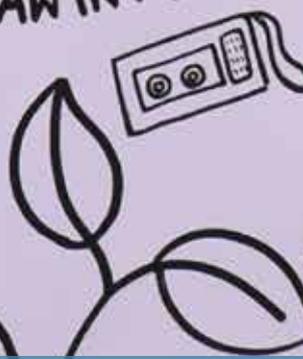
A new word for ?

Without this there is NO MEDIA FREEDOM

EU working with UN on this

### RULE of LAW IN THE MEDIA SECTOR

INDEPENT FUNCTIONING JUDICIARY



# ENVIRONMENT



## LABOUR RIGHTS for JOURNALISTS

## DECENT WORKING CONDITIONS



**ROLE**

BUT... we must  
CREATE a  
**RELEVANT**  
AUDIENCE

**FREEDOM OF SPEECH**  
IS A HUMAN RIGHT

**JOURNALISM**  
has to be <sup>ABOUT</sup> more  
than **BUSINESS**

TRAINING  
Journalists

**EU ROLE**

to ensure **MEDIA FREEDOM**  
is at the **CORE** of a  
Country's **TRANSFORMATION**

Educating  
Public

UPHOLDING

**RIGHTS**

CITIZENS to have  
PARTICIPATING



**FAKE NEWS**



HABIT of  
Spreading  
MISINFORMATION  
↳ Undermines the  
ROLE OF LAW  
+ POLITICAL STABILITY  
Don't FIGHT it - create something **BETTER**  
to attract people AWAY!

**ENDING RIGHTS**

to do their **JOB**s

**FREE**  
THREAT and  
INTIMIDATION



**CREATING  
SECURE  
conditions  
for JOURNALISTS**



# 3. IN FOCUS

In this chapter, we take a closer look at EED's support for women and youth, as well as the opening up to the Western Balkans.



**THE TRUTH**  
HOLDING People  
ACCOUNTABLE  
Encourages + broadcasts  
different views

**ATTACK  
UNACCEPTABLE**

# 3.1 WOMEN AND YOUTH

**Women's participation and youth engagement are both cross-cutting issues that are taken into account across all thematic areas of EED's work. In addition, EED supports initiatives that specifically focus on the participation of women and youth in the democratic process and support them as agents of change.**

EED is strongly committed to developing gender equality in democracy building, and sponsors a large number of organisations that address women's issues. EED funds female leaders, activists, and organisations to advance political participation of women, empower women in democratic decision-making, tackle discrimination, and raise awareness of issues such as exploitation and violence against women. Around a quarter of all EED-funded initiatives include a specific component related to gender. To date, 32 initiatives have focused specifically on women's civic and political participation.

Providing young people with the tools and knowledge to engage in civic activism and create a better future for themselves and their countries is an important aspect of EED support. Youth-centred civic engagement initiatives include a range of innovative, catalytic, and start-up projects ranging from training for young people as effective leaders and opening space for youth empowerment and democratic governance, to tackling political disaffection and promoting inclusion through sports and culture. So far, EED has supported 24 initiatives specifically targeting youth.

### SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH INITIATIVES

In *Tunisia*, EED has funded a number of youth-related initiatives. For example, **Youth Can** started as a movement to promote youth participation in the 2014 government, and was recently revived with a more long-term approach. EED is providing funding as it builds its internal organisation, improves the skills of its staff, and works on long-term strategic planning. During this time, Youth Can is carrying out zero-budget activities, such as organising public debates known as "political cafes" to engage youth in rural areas. As it becomes more established, it plans to seek support from other donors to ensure its long-term sustainability.

**Arselan** is an NGO based in the Tunisian city of Sousse that involves young people in local development and civic engagement. The organisation also supported young people who were candidates in the 2018 municipal elections – the country's first municipal elections since the revolution – training them in communications and increasing their understanding of the role of local government.

In the *Ukrainian* city of Pavlograd, EED is supporting **Art Prostir Fainohrad**, a youth-run NGO that encourages young people to get involved in civic activism. As well as mentoring young people in organising projects in their communities, it runs training courses on media literacy, critical thinking, gender equality, and non-abusive communication.

**GoEast** is an NGO in Eastern *Ukraine* that helps NGOs co-ordinate their activities and trains young people to engage in their communities. GoEast runs peer-exchange programmes for youth to help them connect with other young people in different parts of the country.



**“Young people now don’t remember the dictatorship – they grew up in the emergence of democracy, they have motivation already, they are more sure of their rights ”**

Zyna Mejri, Youth Cane



## FEATURE | He For She

**It has been increasingly recognised that men are important partners in achieving equality for women. Here we profile two EED-supported initiatives that involve men pushing for women's rights.**

*Gallery director and psychoanalyst Hakima Lebbar has produced a book, touring exhibition and series of debates engaging men in the fight for equal inheritance rights for women in Morocco.*

"I've been an activist all my life", says Hakima Lebbar. She first became interested in human rights and equality while still at high school, later becoming involved in various civil society organisations and co-founding the anti-corruption NGO Transparency Morocco.

A practicing psychoanalyst since 1989, she now also runs an art gallery in Rabat. At first glance these might all seem like very different domains, but Lebbar sees a connection between them: "I use my expertise in psychology and my ability to mobilise artists to push for social change."

Lebbar has recently published her third book about issues affecting Moroccan society. Published with EED support, it is an anthology of writings by men – ranging from academics and theologians to poets, musicians and journalists – on the subject of equality in inheritance rights.

In Morocco, a narrow interpretation of Islamic teachings means that women are severely disadvantaged when it comes to inheritance, receiving only half the amount of male heirs. With religion deeply embedded in Moroccan society, the first step towards equality is creating a

national conversation. And since men are advantaged in inheritance matters, who better to advocate for improving equality in inheritance rights than men themselves?

To change attitudes in wider Moroccan society, including among illiterate populations, Lebbar realised that a book alone wouldn't be enough. So as part of the initiative, she invited male artists, aged from 28 to 80, to produce a piece of art inspired by the topic. The resulting exhibition of paintings, photographs, cartoons, sculptures and installations has travelled around the country, accompanied by a series of public debates.

Lebbar was joined by among others Ahmed Aassid, a philosopher, poet and secularist, Abu Hafis, a former extremist preacher turned rights activist, and Farida Bennani a feminist activist and university professor of public law. This allowed the theme to be approached from different perspectives, both religious and secular.

"We have managed to launch the public debate. The next stage is to try and turn this into law," says Lebbar. She knows this will be difficult and will face opposition from religious institutions and associations. But it's part of a process and she is optimistic that progress can be made.

As she says, "After more than 40 years in activism, you don't give up easily!"



*An award-winning Syrian journalist and playwright is helping women across Syria access independent and impartial information with a magazine and website.*

The war in Syria has changed people’s lives in catastrophic and fundamental ways. This is particularly true of women, who often find themselves in new roles, their husbands gone – either killed in the war, imprisoned, seeking refuge abroad, or hiding from recruiting militias or the army. These women want to know what’s happening around them and to make their voices heard.

Mouhamad Mallak, a journalist and award-winning scriptwriter and playwright from the city of Swaida, fled to Turkey after participating in the revolution against the Assad regime. There, he set up two magazines, and trained over a thousand citizen journalists, hundreds of them women.

One of the magazines, of which he is now the Berlin-based editor-in-chief, is the publication of a larger organisation focused on women’s development, Saiedet Souria. Mainly staffed by women, Saiedet Souria aims to give the Syrian women an independent platform to spread awareness of women’s rights, to share their stories and stay informed. With a network of offices across Syria, it makes particular effort to reach marginalised women and children in the most isolated communities, and has recently set up a centre in Raqqa, now liberated from ISIS.

It may seem surprising that a man is in charge of setting up a publication for women, but Mallak is quick to point out that his interest in the plight of women is

not something new. The first TV series he wrote, long before the outbreak of war, looked at the situation of women working in the Middle East, warning of the deterioration of their conditions and their exploitation at work. “It’s important that men get involved in spreading knowledge about women’s rights,” says Mallak.

EED supported Saiedet Souria’s magazine in its early phase in 2015, contributing to the creation of the electronic version, and recently helped it to continue operating through fluctuating donor support.

While there is now an online version, with an active discussion forum, being able to continue distributing printed copies of Saiedet Souria to women in conflict-affected areas which have no internet access is vital, says Mallak. “Most media from Syria are backed by one side or another and only report the atrocities of the other side. The rest have no voice,” he explains. “Some women in isolated areas have no idea what is going on – between one gun and another is just the page of the magazine.”

And he believes that when peace eventually comes, there will be an enormous opportunity for Syrian women. The push for change, he predicts, will come both from those who have remained throughout the war and those who are currently abroad and hope to return. “Syrian women came to Europe and saw a chance to make changes in their lives,” he says. “There are no Syrians who have seen life in Germany and in other countries in Europe who will now accept Syria in its current situation or as it was before.”

# 3.2 WESTERN BALKANS

**Following its successful track record of supporting grassroots initiatives and in recognition of the increasing challenges to civil society and media in the region, the EED Executive Committee announced in February 2018 that it would now be accepting applications from the Western Balkans.**

While the whole Western Balkans region can be classified as a transitional environment, over the past few years, the region has mostly seen tendencies towards democratic decline, characterised by captured media and the diminishing role of independent civil society actors in societal and political developments.

Many civil society organisations in the region have been adjusting their agendas to the strategic guidelines set by donors in order to ensure sufficient funding for survival, but in doing so have lost their connection with citizens. Furthermore, pro-government media are decreasing public trust in the civil society sector through false accusations.

The media sector in general is largely owned by political elites. This has further hardened the context for free, quality media, whose professionalism is already endangered by clickbait and shallow online reporting. Increased attacks on journalists have also been recorded throughout the region.

### OUR APPROACH

EED seeks to empower relevant actors and initiatives in order to boost good examples of civil activism. A special focus is given to initiatives that employ innovative approaches to deepen democratic values and practices, particularly those working at grassroots level. EED support to the Western Balkans focuses on three key areas:

- Civil society – through support to emerging local pro-democracy civil society actors with potential to be effective advocates of socio-political changes.
- Independent media – through support to develop, strengthen, and preserve the media environment in

the region, in particular innovative tools and quality content production.

- Political activism and youth engagement – through support for new forms of engagement and activists.

As with its support elsewhere, EED support in the Western Balkans focuses on providing “value added” and complementary support to other democracy support programmes.

Consequently, EED will rarely support existing well-established civil society and media actors who have access to other donor support. Such actors might still be eligible for support in specific cases such as emergency situations, based on an innovative or risk-taking approach or similar.

### EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

In 2018, EED organised and participated in a number of events related to the Western Balkans, helping to inform EED’s targeted support in the region and keep abreast of developments. The first EED-organised event, on 6 March, focused on the space for political activism in Albania. Also in March, EED held a strategic workshop on the state of the media in the Western Balkans.

Continuing on the important theme of media, EED Executive Director Jerzy Pomianowski spoke at the second edition of the EU–Western Balkans Media Days in Skopje, in September, as well as at a Thomson Foundation roundtable on SME financing models for the digital economy in the region. EED also participated at an expert roundtable hosted by the Permanent Representation of Austria to the EU, in November, to discuss synergies with the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the EU in relation to media freedom in the Western Balkans.

By the end of the year, EED had set up its dedicated team and awarded 14 grants. As expected, most applications came from the media sector, especially related to content production and the renewal of equipment to allow independent media to be less reliant on donor support.



EED Executive Director Jerzy Pomianowski with activists and media representatives in Tirana, Albania © EED

- EED is supporting a Sarajevo-based independent news portal to develop a special section of its website devoted to fake news and to introduce a YouTube blog, in co-operation with well-known journalists and activists throughout *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, in both the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska.
- In *North Macedonia*, an EED grant is enabling portal Inbox7 to resume online activities and publish investigative stories in Macedonian, Albanian, and English, while testing funding options through crowdfunding and online marketing.
- EED provided support to an existing citizen movement and an individual activist in *Montenegro* to revive the country's largely inactive civil society. A two-pronged strategy is focused on connecting individual activists for stronger impact while "awakening" older activists to motivate youth with their personal examples.
- In *Serbia*, EED provided start-up funding to an independent magazine, *Odiseja*, founded by young professionals to promote critical thinking through scientific journalism.
- In *Kosovo*, EED enabled Kosovo Glocal to pioneer the production of podcasts through which they explore and explain the news, targeting mainly youth.

**“ This is a very timely step given the challenges faced by independent media and civil society. EED’s flexible mechanism is certainly relevant to the Western Balkans situation and can offer good complementarity to the activities already funded by the EU and other donors. ”**

Lisbeth Pilegaard, Chair of the Executive Committee





# 4. RESULTS AND LEARNING

In this chapter, we provide an overview of EED's monitoring and evaluation system, and identify some key areas where EED adds value.

## 4. RESULTS AND LEARNING

# 4.1 CAPTURING RESULTS, LEARNING, AND CHANGE

**Monitoring and evaluation is an integral part of EED's work. It is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability, and not only demonstrates the impact of our work, but also enables us to constantly improve and refine our approach based on lessons learned.**

### MONITORING AND EVALUATION

EED was established to contribute to democratisation processes by providing “gap-filling”, flexible, un-bureaucratic, and demand-driven support. The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System has been designed to support this specific approach.

The information it provides on implementation progress and results achieved is used to:

- inform strategic decision-making processes and operational practice, and help optimise EED's ability to respond effectively to emerging changes (opportunities or threats).
- account for the resources spent and progress realised to EED's stakeholders (e.g. Members of the Board of Governors and donors).

More specifically, the M&E System provides EED with up-to-date information on results achieved and changes in the environments in which EED operates. The M&E approach is tailored to the following key features of EED's objectives and operations:

- the complexity of democracy assistance and EED's context-sensitive, risk-taking, and results-oriented approach;
- the flexible, un-bureaucratic, gap-filling, and demand-driven nature of EED's assistance;
- the clear mandate to take risks and operate in repressive and conflict-affected environments.

EED follows an adaptive approach to democracy assistance that involves experimentation, learning-by-doing, and the flexibility to adapt its assistance based on changes in the environments in which it operates and evolving insights into what type of activities work and under which circumstances.

Funding decisions are made based on informed judgments about how to best foster EED's objectives and respond to the (changing) contexts EED operates in, instead of on detailed (long-term) planning efforts.

Other key principles and objectives underlying EED's M&E approach are:

- Providing scope to grantees to be responsive to changing circumstances, experiment, and learn.
- Minimising the burden it places on EED's grantees in terms of data collection and reporting requirements.
- Monitoring and assessing the operational and political risks of EED's assistance carefully to mitigate risks and avoid – as much as possible – doing harm.
- Being based on realistic expectations. Since democratisation processes are complex and EED operates in challenging environments, expectations about what type of M&E information can be generated need to be realistic and acknowledge existing limitations as to what can be measured.

### MONITORING MISSIONS

EED carries out monitoring missions to conduct in-depth evaluation of the impact of EED grants. These can be location-based, reviewing the impact of grants in a specific city, region, or country; thematically based, investigating how support to a specific area can bring about change in a sector; or to answer a question about a particular aspect of EED's added value.

## 4. RESULTS AND LEARNING



- In Ukraine, EED conducted a regional assessment of grants awarded in the Kharkiv area. Since 2015, EED has supported more than ten activists in Kharkiv across a range of sectors, including anti-corruption, media, and gender. EED was praised for its outreach activities that enabled it to identify and support new and emerging actors in the region, as well as for its timely intervention, bringing grants to activists at a time when many of them were struggling to continue with their civic work due to limited access to funding.

EED also invested in significant coaching support and training to ensure potential grantees had the necessary skills in areas such as project management and security. Despite the good work achieved, development partners encouraged more capacity-building support and follow-up grants, to ensure that the new initiatives can attract funding from other sources and become sustainable.

Finally, the evaluation found that the provision of wide-ranging support to a range of actors in Kharkiv has enabled synergies and contributed to a strengthened civil society sector in Kharkiv.

- EED carried out a mission to **Armenia** in the wake of the Velvet Revolution to examine the impact of EED's support to strengthening civil society. The evaluation found that long-term support to those pushing for democratic change, even under restrictive environments, can have positive effects when unexpected opportunities for change arise (see case study, pages 27-29).

**“The most important achievement is that from a group of enthusiasts we have turned into an NGO that is standing firmly on its feet, has a good reputation, and can now get support from other donors.”**

Founder, Kharkiv Anti-Corruption Centre (Ukraine)

- EED examined the relevance, effects, and sustainability of its support to independent media in **Moldova**. The initial findings of the mission highlighted that EED's rapid and flexible support had played a crucial role in ensuring the continuation of key independent and alternative media actors (e.g. TV8), which contributed to ensuring at least a minimum level of plurality in the Moldovan media space. Concerns do exist, however, about the sustainability of independent and alternative media actors, as they are likely to continue to be largely dependent on donor funding, given the unhealthy market environment.

# EED FUNDING PARTNERS

Twenty-three European countries who are members of the Board of Governors have contributed to EED's programme budget to date, as well as Canada through a special grant for Ukraine. The EED operations budget is covered by a European Commission grant of 4 million EUR.

**Canada** supports grassroots democracy in Ukraine. EED is managing the Canadian C\$ 5 million contribution to provide grants for Ukrainian civil society development.



AUSTRIA



BELGIUM



BULGARIA



CYPRUS



CZECH REPUBLIC



DENMARK



ESTONIA



FINLAND



GERMANY



HUNGARY



IRELAND



LATVIA



LITHUANIA



LUXEMBOURG



THE NETHERLANDS



NORWAY



POLAND



ROMANIA



SLOVAKIA



SLOVENIA



SPAIN



SWEDEN



UK



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Design: EU-TURN / Printing: Paperland

Editor: Sarah Crozier / Proofreading: James Clasper

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Funded by the European Union