

EUROPEAN
ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

THEMATIC REPORT 2013-2019



**SUPPORTING MEDIA
FOR DEMOCRACY**

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Cover: This cartoon pays homage to all the journalists and media workers who risk their lives to shed light on the truth. © Sameer Khalil / Dalwaty (Syria).

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Supporting Media for Democracy (2013-2019)

Media play a vital role in holding authorities to account, exposing corruption, providing information to citizens, offering a platform for debate and shaping opinions. These functions mean that independent media are a particular target for authoritarian regimes and for other individuals in society with vested interests. In addition, in our 'post-truth era', where societies are manipulated by all kinds of propaganda and disinformation, many people are attracted by what is easy and familiar. This has meant a drive towards simple identities, polarised audiences and more and more echo-chambers, where individuals' beliefs and 'truths' are constantly reiterated to them in both the on and off-line media.

In such a moment of disorientation, trust is becoming more important than the truth. Trust is a very important conservative value – it makes people believe each other – but when it surpasses truth, then democracy is in crisis.

That is why we need to invest in objective, independent, attractive and trusted media if we are to defend democratic values.

This publication presents EED's work in the area of independent media, and reflects on lessons learned in six years of media and democracy support. It offers an analysis of the worrying trends and challenges faced by media today and calls for an urgent re-set in thinking about donor support to media in the EU neighbourhood. The document also seeks to offer recommendations for the wider donor community.

Key recommendations include the need for a longer-term and more coordinated approach to media support as an essential component of democratisation, recognising the high cost of quality media and the difficulties media have of surviving in increasingly distorted markets and restrictive environments.



Jerzy Pomianowski
EED Executive Director



EED's lessons learned and approach

Over the past six years, EED has ensured a particular focus on media-based projects, funding more than 230 initiatives. This represents around one third of all initiatives supported by EED. In line with EED's added-value philosophy, support is usually focused on areas that cannot currently get funding from other donors, such as seed funding, bridge funding and emergency support, in addition to core funding and funding provided in a discrete way. It is important to note that EED support cannot replace the need for further support from other donors.

Most EED-supported media initiatives fall into one of two categories:

- Small, start-up initiatives that operate more like NGOs
- Larger, professional media outlets.

The smaller initiatives often experiment with innovative ideas, reaching specific segments of society and contributing to media plurality.

Professional independent media (or entities that aspire to this status) are often working in environments with no independent public broadcasters and they face uphill struggles to survive. The extent of their struggles is not always fully appreciated by donors. Core operating costs are significant; quality journalism, especially investigative journalism, is a resource-intensive and long-term activity. Such media outlets require skilled employees, expensive technical equipment and are in direct competition with private or state-owned media. Typically, such media have business models that involve subscriptions and/or advertising revenue, but for reasons as outlined below, will frequently be heavily reliant on donor support.

EED's media work can broadly be divided into the following five thematic areas:

- Ensuring media pluralism
- Supporting innovation
- Countering disinformation
- Investigative journalism and documentation
- Media targeting specific audiences

These areas are presented in detail on the following pages, with examples and case studies of media initiatives EED has supported. In addition, EED supports journalist associations, media capacity-building initiatives and efforts to support media legislation reform and to provide legal aid to journalists.

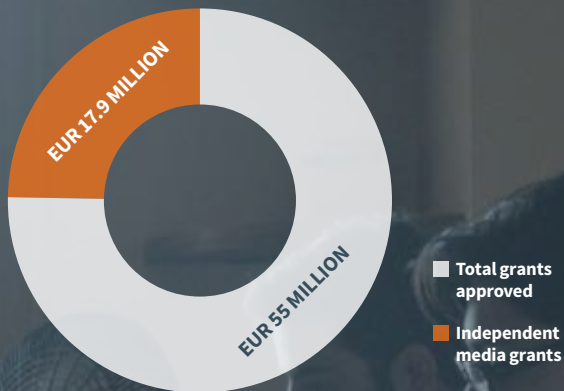
EED has a policy of not naming many of our partners who work in sensitive and repressive environments, as they are often working at high risk to themselves and their families. In this respect, the initiatives highlighted in this brochure do not represent the full breadth of EED's work to support media.

EED'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MEDIA DEBATE

EED attends major media conferences such as UNESCO's Difference Day to mark World Press Freedom Day, the Global Media Forum, and the EU-Western Balkans Media Days, and facilitates the participation of its grantees at these events. EED also regularly hosts and participates in donor coordination meetings and discussions with media actors to share expertise and exchange ideas.

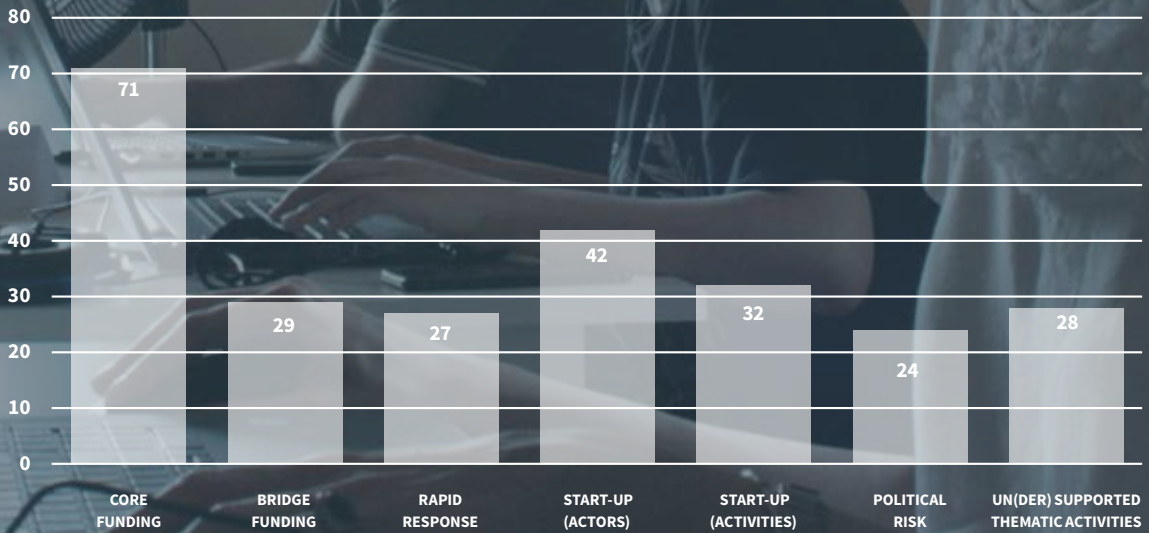
EED has conducted various needs assessments of media in specific regions as well as in-depth monitoring and evaluation of its support to media in particular countries.

EED FUNDING OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA INITIATIVES 2013-2019



NUMBER OF MEDIA INITIATIVES BY TYPE OF SUPPORT

Total **253**



Trends and challenges

In its World Press Freedom Index 2019, Reporters without Borders notes a deterioration in conditions for media in many countries of the EU neighbourhood with increasing persecution of government critics and authoritarian control over news and information. These findings are backed up by the experience of EED grantees, who report back to EED regularly on the challenges they face in their daily work.

POLITICAL PERSECUTION

In the most restrictive environments, independent media are banned, denied licences and harassed through denial of premises, raids on their offices, arrest and legal charges against journalists. Attacks and intimidation of journalists is common, often with apparent impunity, and self-censorship is often necessary for these media to survive.

ONLINE CHALLENGES

In such contexts, independent media have sometimes responded by moving their operations to portals managed from abroad, or by using encrypted private platforms to disseminate content. While online platforms offer a lifeline to such media, they also come with their own challenges.

In financial terms, the dominant online platforms such as Google, YouTube and Yandex siphon off a large share of potential advertising revenue from these media outlets, making financial self-sustainability all but impossible. There is also the relatively expensive cost of using Facebook or Twitter advertising, which is often the most effective way of building audiences for online media.

Another increasing trend is the use of state-sponsored disinformation and trolling to target critical online media. False accusations and complaints about supposed breaches of the platforms' service conditions are organised to provoke take downs. Dominant online platforms such as YouTube continue to lack transparency and there is an absence of an efficient appeals process to deal with this growing phenomenon.

DISTORTED MARKETS

One of the major challenges for all independent media is financial survival. While it is clear that digitalisation has disrupted traditional business models, there are also other factors at play. Governments often deliberately create conditions to starve media of revenue as a way of asserting governmental control and forcing independent media out of business.

Media operate in a competitive environment but in many countries, even in relatively open environments, media markets are distorted. Media outlets or platforms are often owned or financed by oligarchs, political figures or state actors who heavily subsidise media in order to project a particular political viewpoint or narrative, thereby eliminating fair competition. In some countries, advertising cartels under political control have emerged that effectively cut independent or opposition media out of the media advertising market.

Countries with small populations, such as those of the Western Balkans, face additional challenges to deliberate market distortions, due to the small size of the markets in which they operate. While pluralism exists, media compete for shrinking resources and a limited audience, and this can lead to poor quality or politicised journalism resulting in public distrust of the media.

Key recommendations

Based on its own experiences and feedback from grantees, EED offers the following lessons learned as good practices for other donors interested in supporting independent media in the EU neighbourhood, and as a contribution to the policy discussion:

- 1. Scale up support for independent media initiatives** in recognition of their vital role and the costly nature of their work. A key aspect of this is taking a longer-term approach to media support, focused on core funding rather than project-based funding.
- 2. Be realistic about self-sustainability.** Support the development of hybrid business models to increase and diversify revenue of media outlets while recognising the probable ongoing need for donor support. Support to media should be considered as a direct investment in democratic progress, not simply as a business investment.
- 3. Greater donor coherence, coordination and consistency.** EED is able to act fast to provide seed funding, emergency support or bridge funding for media. To complement this, new modalities and funding mechanisms for professional media may be needed to fill the gap in funding for the medium to longer-term support. Combined efforts and coordination between donors are needed to provide adequate funding and synergy of approach. Tailored indicators and evaluation mechanisms should be developed recognising the link between funds, results and impact.
- 4. See media as equal partners.** In much of the EU neighbourhood, journalists and media professionals have a high level of skills and experience. Too often support is donor-driven rather than demand-driven, directing efforts into training that is not appropriate or needed or donor-preferred types of content production that may be simpler to monitor and/or come with fewer risks.
- 5. Be more political.** Media support, especially in more restrictive environments, is a political rather than a technical activity. Donors should consider supporting overtly opposition media outlets where they demonstrate democratic values.
- 6. Ensure visible international political and diplomatic support to journalists and media outlets.** This has been demonstrated in many instances to offer a form of protection, protecting the wellbeing and life of journalists. The EU should exercise its political leverage, especially in candidate countries, to push for a more open media environment. At the same time, it should be recognised that donor support should not always be visible and some partners may not wish to communicate about their funding sources to the broad public.
- 7. Keep the security dimension in mind when working with independent media.** It is important to ensure a plurality of voices and that reliable information is available, especially in fragile environments. This is particularly important when independent media compete with other outlets who are receiving significant funding from single international sources with heavy political agendas, for example Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran.
- 8. Focus on local content.** Local content that is relevant to people's daily lives is often lacking. This can help build trust in the media and counter disinformation.

Ensuring media pluralism

A vibrant independent media is an integral feature of any democratic society. Independent media shine a light on the conduct of governments, hold authorities to account, and provide a diversity of opinions that enable people to make informed choices during elections. It is important to ensure a plurality of voices is maintained and that reliable information is available, especially in fragile environments.

Threats to media pluralism include government restrictions on independent media, deliberate distortion of media markets through political or oligarchic control of media outlets or the advertising markets they depend on, and self-censorship from independent media due to political contexts.

An increasing threat also comes from media funded by single international sources with heavy political agendas, for example from Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran. Independent media serve as an important counterweight to such politicised media.

There are also the global challenges of building financially sustainable media outlets, especially in countries with relatively small populations, such as those of the Western Balkans.

EXAMPLES OF EED SUPPORT:

- EED gave emergency support to several key independent and opposition TV channels in Moldova to allow them to adapt to circumstances that threatened to drive them out of business. **TV8, Pro TV and Jurnal TV** faced intensified pressure from authorities, including advertising bans, fines, eviction from premises, blocking of licences and pressure on business partners.
- EED supports organisations that provide legal support to journalists, such as **P24**, the **Freedom of Expression Association** and the **Media and Law Studies Association** in Turkey, which has seen a huge rise in arrests of journalists in recent times.
- Based in Tripoli, the **Libyan Cloud News Agency** is one of the very few local, independent media outlets operating in Libya today. EED support is helping it counter disinformation and biased reporting from media funded by foreign interests.
- In Serbia, EED has provided start-up funding to **Odiseja**, an innovative “science and society” quarterly magazine that supports critical thinking by addressing current societal issues through the lens of science and fact-based reporting.



“Good content will find its way to different communities”

EED-supported journalist working in a repressive environment in the MENA region

PROVIDING INDEPENDENT AND QUALITY JOURNALISM FOR THE ARAB-SPEAKING REGION

Daraj is an ambitious online media platform based in Lebanon that brings together smaller independent media outlets and professional freelance journalists from across the MENA region to produce high-quality and in-depth reporting. Set up by three experienced Lebanese journalists who wanted to provide an alternative to the politicised and polarised Arabic media on offer, Daraj currently boasts some 200 contributors, many of whom write under pen names for their own safety.

Launched in late 2017, EED seed funding has enabled Daraj to build its brand and reputation. In its first 18 months, Daraj has already made its mark. An early success was its partnership with leading global media as part of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists that released the so-called “Paradise Papers”, which exposed the hidden offshore wealth of the global elite.

In another high-profile report, in December 2018, Daraj exposed how a loans programme run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was being used to support members of pro-regime militias in Syria. The story led to the freezing of the programme and an internal UN investigation. According to CEO Alia Ibrahim, there is a real appetite for investigative reporting in the Arab world, with several long-form reports featuring in Daraj’s ten most-read items.

As well as investigations, Daraj publishes opinion pieces, features on social issues, and is experimenting with formats such as video explainers on current affairs.

Daraj is based on a hybrid business model that combines donor funding with a long-term ambition for self-sustainability. Its growing readership proves there is a real demand for independent media in the Arab world. But, as Ibrahim stresses, there is a need for continued support: “We need to be able to work strategically with a clear vision – for this we need long-term funding. We need to build the culture and to work with a true sense of partnership with our funders and other collaborators.”

EED HELPS TV’S SURVIVAL AT CRITICAL JUNCTURE IN MOLDOVAN POLITICS

TV8 is one of several key independent TV channels in Moldova that EED has helped through difficult times following increased pressure from the authorities on independent media. First, in 2016, EED helped the channel depoliticise, rebrand and transform its status from a privately-owned channel into a civic television run by an NGO and overseen by a board of reputable activists – an important move to help secure future donor support.

A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

Further emergency support was provided when the rebranded channel suffered a politically-motivated delay in receiving the transfer of its broadcasting licence, which affected advertising revenues and threatened its closure. Later, as TV8 struggled to cover operating costs in the country’s politically manipulated media advertising market, EED provided bridge funding to keep the channel running, including covering some core operating costs.

This came at a crucial time for the country politically, as parliamentary elections were nearing and alternative viewpoints were ever more necessary.

VALUE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Following the February 2019 parliamentary elections, Moldova suffered a constitutional crisis, with two alternative governments claiming power. This situation was eventually resolved in June 2019. During this time, TV8 was prominent in reporting events and interviewing the parties involved. TV8 also hosts shows on diverse social and political topics run by 13 civic and pro-democracy activists.

The importance of having a pluralistic media in place during periods of political crisis cannot be overstated, as media keep up the pressure for institutions and parties to act in democratically responsible ways. Independent media in Moldova continue to face a difficult future, with advertising revenue still elusive despite large audiences. However, their proven value to the democratic development of the country should provide donors with a reason for continued support.

Supporting innovative and creative media

New technologies such as social media, podcasting and private messaging channels provide opportunities for alternative media and are particularly important for media operating in restrictive environments.

Often such informal types of media have come to the fore during times of political change, where the fast pace of events means that citizen journalists can emerge as the best sources for accurate, real-time reporting.

The rise in internet connectivity is also changing the way people consume media. Young people increasingly consume media on mobile phones and through social networks, where algorithms can filter out or promote certain content. Social networking platforms can provide both opportunities for independent media and challenges as they adapt to a rapidly changing and largely unregulated space, and compete for attention with disinformation and clickbait.

EED also supports media initiatives that use creative and artistic approaches to communicate with the public about political or social issues, using satirical cartoons, documentary photography or film.

EXAMPLES OF EED SUPPORT:

- EED has supported informal media initiatives in restrictive environments such as Belarus, providing funding to citizen journalists, satirical bloggers and video bloggers, to produce and distribute innovative content using secure messaging apps and to develop alternative models for monetisation.
- **Kosovo 2.0** is an established and respected media outlet in Kosovo*, which has attracted regular donor funding. EED is supporting its expansion into podcasting through the purchase of new equipment as many other donors are more restrictive on the purchase of equipment as part of their funding rules. EED considers this a worthwhile investment into content diversification that will contribute to the long-term sustainability of Kosovo 2.0.
- **4Plus** is a collective of Armenian women photographers which uses documentary photography and film-making to draw attention to human rights and social issues, often with a focus on women. Stories covered have ranged from topics such as marital abuse and the state of mental health facilities to the unfolding of the Velvet Revolution. EED funded a series of reports into labour rights that looked at conditions for theatre workers, construction workers and drivers.

ONLINE TV CHANNEL IS RARE UNCENSORED VOICE IN TURKEY

The media environment in Turkey has deteriorated further since the failed 2016 coup. According to the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), more than 250 journalists have been imprisoned in each of the last three years, making Turkey the country with the largest number of journalists in prison worldwide.

In this hostile context, online TV channel Medyascope has managed to establish itself as a source of independent, uncensored and quality journalism in just a few years. By

utilising the video-streaming application Periscope, they manage to provide a pluralist platform for civil society actors, academics, experts, citizens and journalists who have been fired from their positions, to give in-depth commentary on current affairs.

Medyascope operates as both an online news channel and a content-sharing platform to which a variety of people from across the world contribute to broadcast independent programmes. With EED support, Medyascope has refurbished and expanded its studio and offices in Istanbul, created an editorial team in Ankara and managed to put more of their regular staff on payroll.

*All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in compliance with United Nations Security resolution 1244 (1999) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

ARMENIAN MEDIA AGGREGATOR FILTERS FOR QUALITY INFORMATION IN POLITICISED MEDIA SPACE

InfoCom is Armenia's first and only online media aggregator. A volunteer-led start-up, it came to the fore during Armenia's Velvet Revolution, when it played an important role of keeping the population up to date through its Telegram channel. It has since continued to aggregate news and dispatch it through various channels.

Despite the recent positive democratic developments, Armenia's online media landscape continues to be dominated by political and business interests. Only a small minority of media sources, including online media, can be considered fully independent. There has also been a reported rise in online hate speech and disinformation since the Velvet Revolution.

"The digital era multiplied the influence of disinformation, but it also created new technological means and opportunities for disseminating credible information," says Sevak Mamyon, InfoCom's Editor-in-Chief. "Social media and messengers are tools, that, if in good hands, can be used for the public interest. Infocom was created to be the "good hands"."

With EED support, Infocom is scaling up its efforts to counter disinformation and to bolster media literacy and critical thinking among Armenian citizens. Its plans include a daily newsletter to help readers stay abreast of quickly developing political processes.

InfoCom also plans to establish an online registry of public figures, institutions and events and create an online database of public information to prevent manipulation and retrospective "rewriting of history".



Countering disinformation

Disinformation – the deliberate spreading of false information which is intended to mislead – is a growing global problem. Although not a new phenomenon (states of all stripes have engaged in manipulation of the media, especially in the build-up to and during conflict), the ease and speed with which disinformation can now spread online via social media as well as the increasing sophistication of disinformation tactics has brought renewed focus to the issue.

Disinformation can polarise societies and aggravate divisions and contribute to an overall distrust of the media. This makes support to truly independent media more vital than ever. EED research has found that this is often best done by focusing on producing locally focused content, which is usually absent from the more geopolitically focused disinformation. Quality content that is more relevant to people's everyday lives can help attract audiences away from sources of disinformation.

Other relevant action includes supporting fact-checking initiatives and efforts to increase critical thinking and media literacy.

EXAMPLES OF EED SUPPORT:

- EED has provided funding to alternative media actors, such as **bloggers** and **citizen journalists**, who focus attention on local news and issues as well as countering disinformation.
- EED supports fact-checking initiatives that seek to tackle disinformation head-on, such as **Teyit.org** and the **On Watch Association** in Turkey. EED is supporting On Watch's Doğruluk Payı Project to enhance citizens' knowledge about their elected representatives and to foster fact-based political discussions.
- **Kometa** is a Moldovan social media start-up aimed at providing accurate mobile-first content as an alternative to clickbait disinformation that many youth encounter. EED helped Kometa relocate its operations abroad, to a safe jurisdiction, after it came under politically motivated pressure.



SPECIAL PROJECT: COUNTERING DISINFORMATION IN THE RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA SPACE

EED has significantly contributed to the pushback against Russia's disinformation campaign in the Eastern Partnership countries by strengthening the independent Russian language media available in those countries.

EED played a lead role in bringing this issue to the top of the EU agenda with its landmark feasibility study *Bringing Plurality and Balance to the Russian Language Media Space*. The report was commissioned by the Dutch government in January 2015 in a direct response to disinformation by Kremlin-aligned sources, which followed the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukrainian in July 2014.

Concluding that the Russian-language media space had been neglected by donors and thus became vulnerable to malign information campaigns, the report made a number of recommendations, including strengthening independent media outlets, both in news and non-news content production.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

Alongside the creation of the Prague-based Russian Language News Exchange (RLNE), EED, together with other donors, supported the development of the Riga-based Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME).

EED has also coordinated the establishment of the 'Creative Content Support Fund' (Content Fund). The Content Fund is an innovative instrument established to provide funding to broadcasters and audio-visual platforms working for plurality and balance in the Russian-language media space in the Eastern Partnership and beyond.

USING NON-NEWS CONTENT TO BUILD AUDIENCES

Building on the findings of the EED report and that non-information content determines the choice of media platforms by audiences, the Content Fund provides grants for the production of original non-news Russian-language content as well as the provision of acquired Russian-language non-news content. Through this strategy, the Content Fund has the potential to attract a significant number of audiences who currently remain outside the reach of independent media.

Working with around 30 independent media outfits in the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia and the Baltic countries, the Content Fund has awarded 83 grants worth €4.2 million to 19 media platforms since late 2016. As a result, some 100 hours of high-quality creative content has been produced and 460 hours of international and Russian content acquired. Supported programmes include cooking, talent and children's TV shows, as well as factual and historical documentaries.

PRODUCTION HIGHLIGHTS

- *The Taste of the Country* by UA:Persnyi (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.

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.

Investigative journalism and documentation

Media initiatives that document human rights violations or expose corruption make an important contribution to democratic progress, yet they are among the highest risk activities for journalists. Investigative journalism is also increasingly under threat because of the cost and time involved in pursuing stories. With many media outlets struggling to make ends meet, it is often impossible to concentrate resources on a single story, and there are also the political and personal risks to both media outlets and journalists who expose malpractice.

In conflict areas, human rights violations often go unreported or are misreported by the claims and counterclaims of parties to the conflict. Journalists who try to shine a light on the facts become targets themselves, as has tragically been seen all too often in Syria.

Documenting the truth about abuses of human rights during conflict is also a way of preparing for future peace and reconciliation processes. Supporting media in these contexts can therefore be seen as an investment in future peace and democracy processes.

EXAMPLES OF EED SUPPORT:

- **Journalists for Human Rights** in Armenia uses media as a tool to pressure the government on human rights issues, for example by exposing injustices in the army and questioning unexplained deaths of soldiers.

- EED has supported the **Al-Jumhuriya Collective**, which was set up in 2012 by a group of pro-democracy writers and intellectuals to bear witness to the events of the conflict in Syria and to provide an independent Syrian analysis of what was happening on the ground in the country and in society.
- EED supports community-based initiatives in Syria and Libya that monitor local authorities and serve as a watchdog.
- **The Fourth Estate** is a leading investigative media outlet in Ukraine that has exposed a number of corruption scandals in Western Ukraine. EED provided support to help the outlet regain stability after an arson attack against its offices.
- EED provided start-up funding for **Vilne Radio**, which reports from one of the most unstable parts of the frontline in Donbas in Eastern Ukraine. Vilne Radio provides the only alternative source of information to Russian-sponsored media sources for the local residents and soldiers, as well as people in the non-government controlled territories. The station's growing popularity can be attributed to its focus on producing material relevant to the interests of local people. It is also the only media outlet in the region to include investigative journalism, including on topics related to the local government.



“We are liberal, progressive universalists and we see ourselves as part of this global battle for values. Our readers see Europe as natural allies for emancipation and change.”

*Karam Nachar, Executive Director,
Al-Jumhuriya Collective (Syria)*

HOW ONE SMALL MEDIA CAUSED A SEISMIC SHIFT IN MOLDOVAN POLITICS

Mold-Street, a small Romanian-language media outlet in Moldova, was the first to investigate banking fraud in the country, uncovering the billion-dollar theft as part of the so-called “Russian laundromat” scandal that broke in November 2014.

The scandal, which involved several political figures and high-profile businessmen, spurred the largest popular protests since the country gained independence. During these protests, new civil and political groups emerged around non-geopolitical and

anti-corruption agendas. These groups formed the basis of the political forces that defeated oligarchic rule and installed a democratic government in Moldova in June 2019.

The investigation was simultaneously pursued by **Newsmaker**, the main Russian-language portal in Moldova. These two media have been instrumental in helping the rest of the media community in Moldova pursue the story further.

Mold-Street received start-up funding from EED, while **Newsmaker** received EED funding in the early stages of development. These are an example of how support to media can have a direct impact on democratic development.

Photos from a photo-documentary on labour rights for theatre workers in Armenia



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Media targeting specific audiences

As part of its efforts to support inclusive democracies, EED assists media initiatives that target specific populations such as ethnic or linguistic minorities, women and youth.

Many such audiences are neglected by existing media, and supporting targeted media is a way of promoting the democratic participation of these communities. Such media frequently require donor support for their core operations as they often target smaller and excluded audiences.

EXAMPLES OF EED SUPPORT:

- EED supported the online version of the Berlin-based **Saiedet Souria** magazine aimed at women in Syria and promoting women's rights and their participation in the public sphere. EED also provided bridge funding to help the magazine continue during a period of fluctuating donor support.
- EED is supporting **Romalitika.me**, a portal led by young trained Roma journalists in Montenegro. The portal will report on the challenges that the Roma community face to achieve their rights and to ensure adequate social inclusion. The grant supports the media's core operations and the production of investigative stories dealing with sensitive cases of Roma exclusion, including topics that are not priorities for other donors. The portal also promotes Roma culture and community initiatives.

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Amey Al-ool'ooo

MEGAPHONE: AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICES IN LEBANON

Working mainly on a volunteer basis and writing anonymously, the Lebanese collective of young journalists Megaphone uses social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to distribute tailored content targeted at youth audiences.

“We noticed that mainstream media didn’t speak our language, that our narratives remained untold,” says Jamal, one of the co-founders of the Lebanese collective Megaphone. Using video explainers and bite-sized news reporting that appeal to tech-savvy youth audiences, they aim to provide alternatives in content as well as in form.

For example, during the much-postponed legislative elections in 2018 – Lebanon’s first under a new proportional system – Megaphone provided information

to help voters understand the new system as well as interviews with candidates who were excluded from the mainstream channels.

In addition to writing for youth, Megaphone covers issues related to groups whose voices are marginalised by the politicised and sectarian Lebanese media establishment, such as refugees, Palestinian refugees, women and migrant workers.

“We have an agenda,” they admit. “Our agenda is about promoting equality of rights, social justice, and civil liberties for both citizens and non-citizens in Lebanon, and holding the establishment to account.”

As Megaphone tries to build on its successes to date, its biggest obstacle is funding. The young volunteers already come with a high level of technical expertise but, as Jamal acknowledges, they are competing with the big pockets of state media giants – a story that will be familiar to many of their counterparts in other countries.



EED In Brief

The European Endowment for Democracy is an independent, grant-making organisation, established in 2013 by the European Union (EU) and EU member states as an autonomous international trust fund to foster democracy in the European neighbourhood and beyond.

EED has established itself over the past six years of its operations as a vibrant, innovative, and well-respected member of the democracy support community. EED has awarded over 800 grants during this period, to grantees that include dedicated civic, human rights and political activists, independent media, and journalists.

OUR MISSION

EED's goal is to provide **flexible**, timely support to democracy activists, complementing other EU and member state democracy-support programmes. EED is a demand-driven, context-based organisation that bases support on a principle of fostering — not imposing — democracy and facilitating local initiatives. EED takes an **unconventional** approach and invests in **transformational** ideas and the people behind them. EED plays a vanguard role in supporting fledgling civil society organisations or pro-democracy actors unable to obtain funding from other donors — whether due to restrictive legal environments, government repression, security concerns, or political sensitivities.

WHERE WE WORK

EED's activities focus primarily on the European neighbourhood (Eastern Partnership countries, the Western Balkans and Turkey, and the Middle East and North Africa regions). As far as possible, EED aims to ensure a geographical balance of engagement and funding between the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. In addition, some grants are also provided for relevant applications from countries in the area adjacent to the neighbourhood, depending on needs, available funds, and political priorities.

ADDED VALUE

Over the past six years, EED has proven very effective at providing targeted and much-needed support to pro-democracy actors. Given the strikingly diverse range of countries in which it works, EED tailors support to the distinctive realities, challenges, and needs on the ground. EED specialises in cases where the space for civil society is shrinking because of administrative, legal, social, and political barriers, and it accepts significant political and operational risks as part of its operations. Its distinctive niche lies in its capacity to operate in difficult, often dangerous environments that are off limits to other donors. EED amplifies citizens' voices and facilitates the work of activists who are keeping the democratic struggle alive in often disturbingly harsh environments. In this way, EED successfully addresses an important gap in EU democracy support.

GOVERNANCE

The EED Board of Governors consists of 43 members: representatives of the 28 EU member states, Norway, the European External Action Service, a representative designated by the European Commission, nine Members of the European Parliament, and three members elected to represent European civil society.

The Executive Committee consists of seven members who represent a variety of expertise, including members with strong experience in civil society and foundation work, as well as representatives from EU member states. The Committee meets on average every two months to take funding decisions.

The Board meets every six months and is responsible for the mandate, mission, and overall guidance of EED's operations and development. It receives regular reports from the Executive Committee and the Executive Director.

EED Funding Partners

Twenty-three European countries that are members of the Board of Governors have contributed to EED's programme budget, as well as **Canada** through a special grant for Ukraine.

The EED operations budget is covered by a European Commission grant.



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