

Supporting People
Striving for Democracy

ANNUAL
REPORT
2021

EUROPEAN
ENDOWMENT ^{FOR} DEMOCRACY

Supporting People
Striving for Democracy

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2021**

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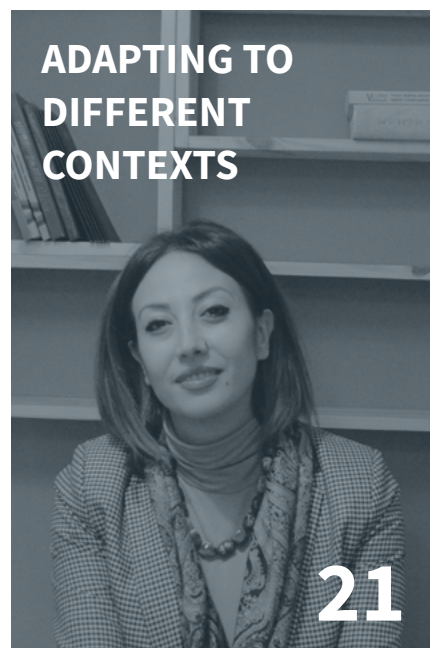


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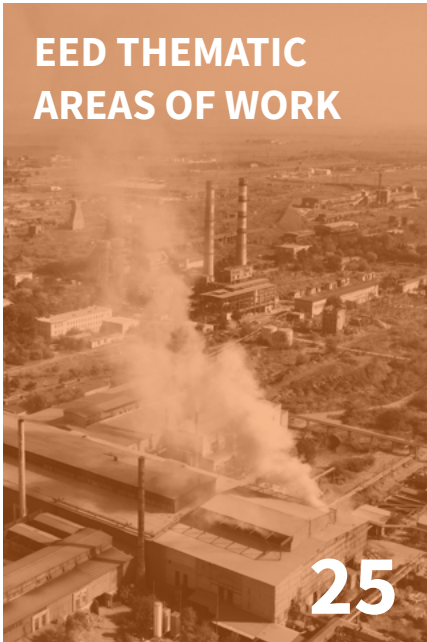
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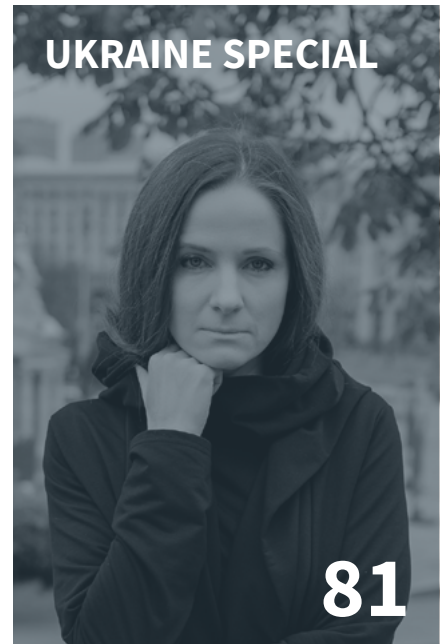
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FOREWORD

2021 was a difficult year for democracy, with democratic backsliding in many countries worldwide, including within the countries of the European Neighbourhood and beyond.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, the Tunisian President suspended parliament in July in a move that called into question the concentration of power in his hands and respect for the rule of law. In neighbouring Algeria, the authorities have systematically repressed the Hirak movement and independent media throughout the year. In Egypt, pro-democracy and human rights activists are constantly targeted, and face arbitrary arrests and trials on trumped-up charges, with many activists tortured in prison. In Libya, planned elections have yet again been postponed.

The situation in the East varies from country to country. In Moldova, the election of a new pro-democratic Prime Minister is a positive step forward, whereas Georgia and Armenia have faced significant democratic challenges during the year.

In Belarus, the situation has deteriorated significantly. As Belarus suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership, the regime ramped up its repression campaign against civil society and independent media. Many opposition figures, including Syarhei Tsikhanouski, former presidential candidate and husband of opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who gave an impressive speech in the European Parliament last November, received harsh and lengthy prison sentences. In May, the Belarusian authorities forced down a plane flying from one EU capital to another to arrest the prominent blogger and journalist Raman Pratasevich. Belarus is now the most dangerous country in Europe for media professionals and pro-democracy forces.

The EU has consistently condemned the actions of the Lukashenka regime and reiterated our solidarity with the Belarusian people. The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) continues to play a leading role in European support for Belarusian civil society and independent media in the country and in exile, as well as acting as a basket fund for donor support to the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.

Developments in the Western Balkans and Turkey are also concerning. Last November, the UN High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina warned of a 'very real' prospect of a return to conflict and that the country is in imminent danger of falling apart. In Serbia, journalists who criticise the authorities face harassment, threats and intimidation, and there has been a noted increase in extremist attacks against peaceful environmental demonstrations.

The deteriorating human rights situation in Russia is of particular concern. The decision of a Moscow court to close Memorial Human Rights Center, Russia's oldest human rights group, under the same 'foreign agent' legislation that has been used

to target dozens of other NGOs and media outlets critical of the government, marks a further escalation in the sustained assault against civil society, human rights defenders, and independent media in Russia.

Last October, the European Parliament awarded the well-known Russian opposition leader and anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. As Mr Navalny continues to languish in prison, this award recognises his immense personal bravery and reiterates Parliament's demand for his immediate release.

EED's flexible and innovative approach continually proves itself highly relevant, particularly as challenges to democracy have increased during this ongoing pandemic period. EED's work supporting civil society actors and independent media within the European Neighbourhood and beyond complements other European Union human rights and democracy programmes. The EU's 'Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024' sets out clear strategic objectives, and EED is an important contributor to these objectives.

As 2021 drew to a close, US President Joe Biden hosted a two-day virtual Summit for Democracy that was attended by 100 countries. The President, and many other democratic leaders, called for renewed commitments to preserve democracies against the spread of authoritarianism, noting that democracy needs 'champions' and has to be constantly renewed. This multilateral forum was a timely opportunity to bolster democracies and to defend human rights, and this work will continue throughout 2022 in the lead-up to the follow-up summit next December. In an initiative led by EED, 14 global pro-democracy organisations developed an informative document for this Summit, the 'Five Messages for the Summit for Democracy', identifying key issues to advance democracy worldwide.

As I write these words, I am taking part in a European Parliament fact-finding mission to Ukraine to demonstrate Parliament's solidarity with the Ukrainian people and our opposition to any steps Russia might take to further escalate the situation. This latest crisis is further evidence of the threats to democracy we face at Europe's borders. The work of EED is crucial in this endeavour. Such work helps develop a democratic mindset within society, as civil society and independent media can keep citizens informed, take part in the development of policy and demand accountability from their governments.



1 February 2022

David McAllister

Chair of EED's Board of Governors and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the European Parliament



INTRODUCTION

It is a privilege to welcome you to the European Endowment for Democracy's 2021 Annual Report, which marks the eighth year of EED's work for democracy. 2021 was another year where the coronavirus pandemic shaped our lives and when the democratic futures in many of the countries where we work continued to be challenged.

In 2021, EED received 1062 applications for support, 293 of which were funded for a total of over €25 million.

It is noteworthy that despite ongoing difficulties - with teleworking still the norm, international travel limited, and even social interactions restricted in many contexts - EED grantees have consistently adapted to new restrictions, moving online when they cannot work in-person and developing new ways of working, as needed. Such adaptability has been crucial in more autocratic contexts, where regimes continue to use the pandemic to further curtail free speech and democratic freedoms.

As usual in this report, we include profiles on some of the civil society activists, human rights activists and independent media supported by EED, all of whom are working hard to develop a culture of democracy within their countries. As has been the case in previous years, we also profile some former grantees, or EED alumni, organisations and individuals who have gone on to become important change-makers within their societies.

Many EED partners work in highly hostile environments where they face constant danger of arrest, torture, and other forms of direct oppression. We believe that protecting their safety must remain our top priority. While we have included several incognito stories in this year's report from such contexts, the identities of these partners are heavily disguised.

We also include an update on Belarus, which continues to be a focus for EED's work. The repressive campaign against the protest movement escalated during the year, and the regime became increasingly aggressive, attacking and arresting activists, politicians, and media personnel. It is sobering to note that at the end of 2021, there were nearly 1,000 political prisoners in jail, and that over 100,000 Belarusians had fled the country. EED continues

to work closely with Belarusian civil society activists and independent media. I am constantly impressed by these activists' tenacity and determination, and their conviction that despite the current repression, the embattled regime cannot last forever, and that Belarusian society wants change.

Last December in the lead-up to the Biden administration's Summit for Democracy, EED was instrumental in the development of 'Five Messages for the Summit for Democracy'. Supported by 14 international pro-democracy organisations, these messages highlight the key actions necessary to protect and promote democracy worldwide. We have included the full text of these Five Messages, and this messaging will continue to inform our activities throughout 2022 and those of our international partners, as we all prepare the follow-up summit and plan our ongoing work.

One of the important issues we will focus on over the coming period, and one highlighted within the Five Messages, is how to ensure that technology companies do not facilitate authoritarian censorship. We have included here a brief analysis of the effect of big technology companies on democracy, a phenomenon of increasing concern to many of our partners.

EED's grantees are at the heart of our work, and we are constantly inspired by their brave stories and their activism. They continue to have new ideas, optimism and the energy to bring about democratic progress and change, despite often facing almost insurmountable challenges. They are the *raison d'être* of EED's grant making, and the EED Team is proud to be part of their democratic journeys.



Jerzy Pomianowski

Executive Director of the European Endowment for Democracy



IDP 2018



Bilirea LAB 2018



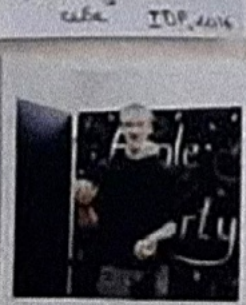
Receipt gas Smrsk Chuvstvenno 2019



Food Recycling 2019



Ustav of nashu saba IDP 2016



Apple Party 2019



Forest Space 2016



100 spetsial'nykh 100 2015



Prosvetnyy khorosho 2018



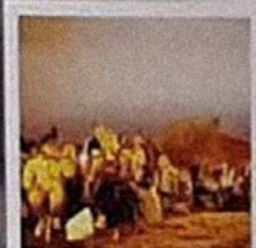
Refugee - Prosvetnyy khorosho 2018



Detamniy khorosho IDP 2017



Fitness Open Air IDP 2018



Kuollon 2016



Prosvetnyy khorosho IDP 2018



Haitonen's khorosho 2015



Yaponiya khorosho, uchi khorosho 2019



Urban Music Camp IDP 2019



Ustav khorosho IDP 2015



Prosvetnyy khorosho 2015



Haitonen's khorosho IDP Khorosho 2015

ТыТ
МОЖЕ БИТИ
БАШ
ПРОЕКТ



IDP 2019



Prosvetnyy khorosho 2015



Ustav khorosho khorosho Smrsk 2019



Sinifskiy khorosho



IDP 2015



30 guli khorosho khorosho IDP 2017



April - ob'ed 2019



Prosvetnyy khorosho khorosho IDP 2017



Free Walking Tours 2016



Haitonen's khorosho IDP 2017



Prosvetnyy khorosho khorosho khorosho 2015



Ustav khorosho khorosho khorosho 2015



Yaponiya khorosho, uchi khorosho 2019



Ustav khorosho khorosho 2017

ABOUT EED

The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) 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.

All EU member states are members of EED's Board of Governors, together with Members of the European Parliament, representatives of Norway, the United Kingdom, and the European External Action Service (EEAS), a member designated by the European Commission, as well as three members elected to represent European civil society. Since its inception, EED has provided over 1,630 grants and has evolved into a vibrant, innovative, and respected member of the democracy support community.

EED funds a vast array of registered and unregistered pro-democracy actors, including human rights and political activists, pro-democratic movements, civil society organisations, emerging leaders, independent media, and journalists who may be unable 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.

1630

**grants approved
since EED's
establishment**



Our mission

EED aims to provide flexible support to democracy activists, complementing other EU and member state democracy-support programmes. EED provides context-based, demand-driven support based on the 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 operations.

Our vision

- » We believe in taking an unconventional approach to supporting democracy.
- » We focus our tailor-made, flexible, and timely grants on democracy activists who cannot always get financial support from other donors.
- » We invest in transformational ideas and the people behind them.

Where we work

EED works predominantly in the European Neighbourhood (Eastern Partnership, Middle East, and North Africa), the Western Balkans, and Turkey, and aims to ensure, as far as possible, a geographical balance of engagement and funding. Some grants are provided for relevant applications from countries adjacent to the neighbourhood, depending on needs, available funds, and political priorities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gives an overview of the European Endowment for Democracy's work in 2021 supporting democracy in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods of the European Union. It reviews the different contexts in which EED operates and includes inspiring stories of EED grantees, who constantly work to foster and develop democracy in their own countries.

Adapting to different contexts

EED provides democracy support in different countries across the European Neighbourhood, each with its own socio-economic environment and political system, ranging from transitional environments to authoritarian regimes and full conflict environments. With environments constantly in flux, as witnessed in many contexts in 2021, EED's approach is flexible and tailor-made for each situation.



Areas of support

Initiatives supported by EED can be broadly divided into eight major thematic areas: anti-corruption and public accountability; independent and social media platforms; civic activism and participation; human rights activism and monitoring; women's civic and political participation; inclusive society, sexual orientation, and gender identity (SOGI); arts and culture; and youth.

This report is structured around these thematic areas, showcasing examples of initiatives supported by EED for each of them. These include, among many others, a satellite TV station covering news about Sudan during the recent *coup d'état*; a grassroots activist group trying to prevent environmental damage in Bosnia and Herzegovina; a collective of feminist lawyers addressing gender-based discrimination in Turkey; and a human rights organisation counteracting activities discrediting democracy in Armenia.

Many EED partners operate in contexts that can be extremely dangerous for pro-democracy activists. Because of this, for the third year running, this report includes several anonymous profiles of grantees who work in sensitive contexts, with their names changed to protect their identity.

With EED now completing its eighth year of operation, it is fitting to include some profiles of former grantees, now EED alumni, who have since established themselves as successful, fully-fledged civil society organisations.



Special focus on Tunisia

This annual report includes a focus on Tunisia, where the political situation remains tense after the 25 July decision by President Kais Saïed to suspend parliament and dismiss the prime minister. While many Tunisians have applauded these actions as a necessary reaction to Tunisia's economic, political, and health crisis, others have denounced these actions as a *coup d'état*. This section includes profiles of several EED grantees in Tunisia.

Special focus on Ukraine

Eight years after the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, its legacy and reform progress continue to be challenged. The revolution saw the emergence of a new wave of activism and marked a change in the political order. Despite overall positive shifts in society, deep structural governance issues remain. Civil society plays a vital role in consolidating pro-democratic developments in Ukraine in a context of low public trust in government and a recent backsliding in the reform agenda.

EED has a significant portfolio in Ukraine with 159 grant awards in 2022 in 22 of its 25 regions. This section includes profiles of a diverse range of EED grantees, including a women's legal organisation, initiatives focused on Crimea, and several EED alumni grantees who have gone on to achieve significant success.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning are crucial for reflecting on EED's effectiveness in our democracy support work, and we regularly conduct monitoring activities to evaluate the impact of our work. This ensures that EED continues to provide flexible, unbureaucratic, and demand-driven support, which is vital for long-lasting change in the countries of our operations. This year, EED carried out its second External Evaluation, and a summary of its conclusions is presented here.

Governance, human resources, and budget

The EED Secretariat has continued to grow together with the scope and volume of our activities and can now count on 47 core staff members from 27 different countries. A successful paid traineeship programme allows young graduates from Europe and the European Neighbourhood to gain experience in the field of democracy support.

Twenty-five European countries that are members of the Board of Governors have contributed to EED's programme budget to date, as has Canada in special contributions for Ukraine and Belarus. This year, EED also received contributions from Iceland and the Robert Bosch Stiftung. A European Commission grant covers EED's operations budget. In 2021, EED managed a budget of approximately €30 million.

EED's APPROACH

Innovative

EED is open to new and innovative ideas and responds dynamically to requests for assistance when providing support to develop democracy. Although most initiatives fall into one of the eight thematic areas covered in this report, EED welcomes creative proposals that approach democracy through different lenses. Its grantees come from all walks of life, and many are new to activism. EED is frequently a lifeline to organisations struggling to continue their work in times of turmoil or when facing severe repression.



Demand-driven and flexible

EED adapts its 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 turning around such requests within a few days.



Supporting the unsupported

EED seeks primarily to support groups and activists that are unable or lack the capacity to access EU democracy-support programmes, but with a guiding principle of investing in transformational ideas and the people behind them. It also invests time in capacity-building of grantees in areas such as programme and project management, ensuring that good ideas can be transformed into functioning organisations.



EED IN NUMBERS

€25 million

in democracy support approved in 2021



293
new funded initiatives



1062
requests for support



47
core staff members from 27 countries



94,297
unique users reached through our Facebook posts



40%
increase in followers on LinkedIn

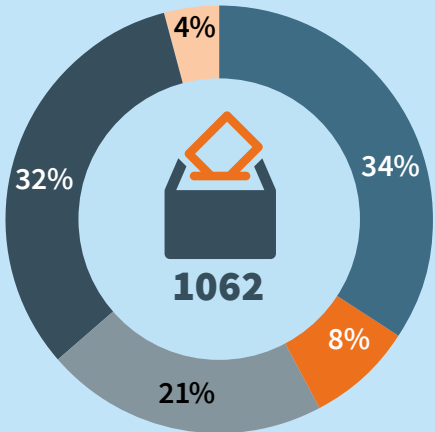


73,544
followers across 4 social media platforms



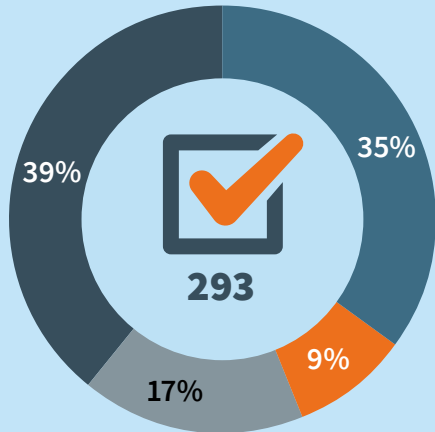
PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

Applications received per region 2021



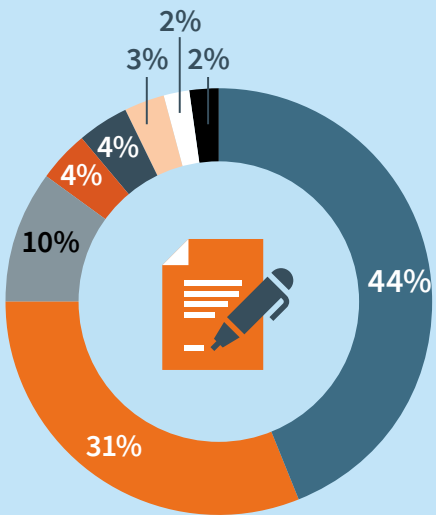
- Eastern Partnership (EaP)*
- Western Balkans & Turkey
- Eurasia
- Rest of World
- Middle East & North Africa

Number of initiatives approved by ExCom in 2021 by region



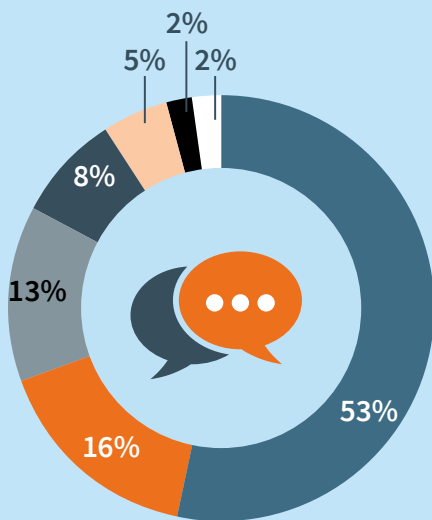
- Eastern Partnership (EaP)*
- Western Balkans & Turkey
- Eurasia
- Middle East & North Africa

*For the purposes of this report, Belarus continues to be included within the EaP



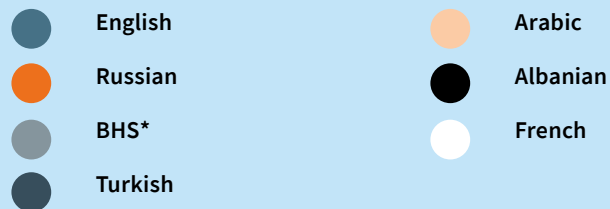
Initiatives supported in 2021 per thematic area

- Independent and social media platforms
- Governance, rule of law, and anti-corruption
- Civic activism & participation
- Sexual orientation and gender identity
- Human rights, activism, and monitoring
- Women's civic and political participation
- Arts & culture
- Youth

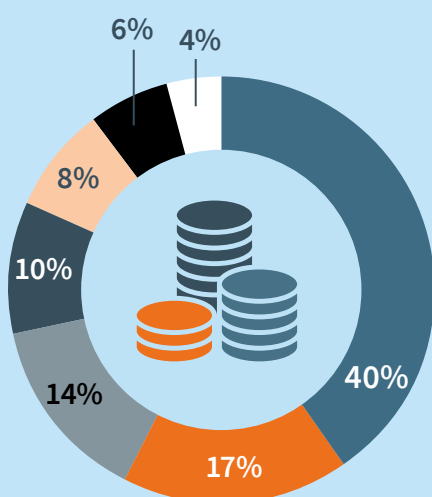


Language of application

EED accepts applications in all the main languages of our partners. Here is a breakdown showing the languages of all applications in 2021.

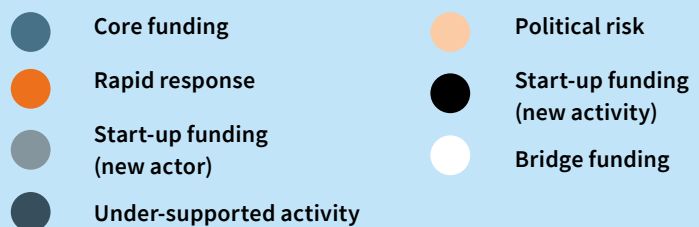


*Languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia



EED added value

A key part of EED's mission is to 'add value' to existing European mechanisms of support to pro-democracy actors and activities. EED identifies an added-value for each grant as part of its ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning process.



EVENTS

EED Events provide opportunities for grassroots activists from our partner organisations to make their voices heard within EU institutions, member states, and the global democracy-support community. EED acts as a ‘Democracy Support House’, enabling conversations between key institutional stakeholders and these activists, often in closed-door events that allow open and frank discussions.

In 2021, EED organised, co-organised, and participated in 33 events, including international conferences and summits.

Most EED-organised events are closed-door sessions targeted at institutional audiences with a specific interest in the relevant region or subject discussed. Each event is centred on activists’ stories and their experiences and opinions of their particular contexts.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, most events remain online, given ongoing travel restrictions, although some hybrid and in-person events also took place during 2021. Online events are generally shorter and benefit from greater availability of both activists and audiences, who are more likely to be able to allot a couple of hours from their day to attend.

Events organised with partners were, in most cases, open to wider audiences. EED participated in **Difference Day**, the **International Democracy Week**, and the **Global Democracy Coalition Forum** held just before the **2021 Summit for Democracy**, as well as a number of other high-profile events.

EED continues to support partners to attend a range of international conferences, including **Forum 2000**, the **World Forum for Democracy** and the **One World Film Festival**. These are important occasions for activists to gain access to new audiences and gain valuable experience.

EED also organises regular policy debates and donor meetings, as well as strategic reflection meetings for all regions in which we operate.



© Political Cafe

“Students can be punished with travel bans – the same thing happens to human rights defenders and academics; being prosecuted might also hinder their career prospects in the future. And yet there are protests all over Turkey, and when students cannot physically protest, they raise their voices on social media.”

Berna Akkızal (co-founder and director of Civic Space Studies Association)

Power to the youth – engagement and activism under authoritarianism in Turkey

In April, an EED-organised online webinar focused on the youth in Turkey from the perspective of EED partners active in the field of students’ rights, gender equality, and civic engagement. These activists spoke about their struggles and expectations while working in a challenging and increasingly autocratic environment.

Speakers noted that despite increasing repression, the young people of Turkey are mobilising even as they struggle to find a place for themselves within a difficult economic and political situation that has further deteriorated during the Covid-19 pandemic. They described how young people are pushing back and raising their voices and are creating new platforms that offer more inclusive, informal, and innovative ways to organise.



© Alia Ibrahim

“At Daraj, we give a voice to those whose stories are underreported, particularly women and minorities. 75 percent of our journalists are women: we give them free space to write the stories they want to tell.”

Alia Ibrahim (Daraj Media)

Difference Day 2021

EED was one of the co-organisers of the seventh edition of **Difference Day 2021**, the annual Brussels-based celebration of UN World Press Freedom Day on 3 May. This year, the event focused on ‘Women Breaking the News’, celebrating the work of women journalists around the world and highlighting the inequality, lack of visibility, and gender-based threats they face.

EED partner Alia Ibrahim, a co-founder of *Daraj Media*, an independent media outlet from Lebanon, was one of the Difference Day speakers, taking part in a panel with fellow journalists from Belarus and India.

“We have built the capacity to avoid mistakes, to learn from international media experiences, to open discussion and dialogue, and to establish administrative responsibility and positive competition in the media landscape for good and transparent journalism. In the last ten years, Syrian media has self-improved.”

Jawad Sharbaji (Enab Beladi)

“What happened on 25 July split civil society in two. People who had been working together for years found themselves with different opinions. Civil society is confronting itself within its own limits. We are struggling to understand how to intervene, since we don’t know what is going to happen.”

Nour Kaabi (formerly of Jamaity and founder of Houloul initiative)

The voice and resilience of Syrian independent media in ten years of conflict

In the framework of the Brussels V Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’ on 29-30 March 2021, organised by the European Union, EED co-hosted an online event together with Free Press Unlimited and International Media Support (IMS) focused on independent Syrian media. Speakers highlighted the potential for independent media to shape the future of Syrian society by providing access to credible information, enabling public debates, and countering hate speech, fake news, and polarisation.

Civil society reacts to the current crisis in Tunisia

In October, an EED webinar included speakers from leading Tunisian civil society and independent media organisations who discussed how the ongoing political crisis in the country is affecting their work. This online event gave a unique insight into the challenges now faced by civil society as it struggles to adapt to the ongoing crisis (see ‘Tunisia special’ for further information).



"Democracy is an abstract concept when you have it, but becomes real when you start losing it. It's a global problem, we need to promote the idea that we're all in this together and should cooperate to solve it," says moderator @ETemelkuran

#DemocracyWeek2021 #StrongerTogether



“There are many small, ethical, high-quality media outlets in Georgia, but we totally depend on grants because of the lack of advertising income... We can’t compete with mainstream media that are supported by the government. The government portrays journalists as an enemy and discredits us... There is no space for constructive communication with the government.”

Nata Dzvelishvili (CEO of Indigo Publishing)

International Democracy Week 2021

For the seventh year in a row, EED, in collaboration with other leading pro-democracy organisations, marked the **International Day of Democracy** with a series of events this year under the theme ‘Stronger together: Partnerships for Supporting Democracy’. Like last year, this was an online event held over several days.

EED hosted two panels. The first was a discussion among executive directors and representatives from European democracy-support organisations on events in Afghanistan and the repercussions on democracy support when democracy faces severe challenges but retains significant support from citizens around the world.

The second panel included activists and independent journalists from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, and the Western Balkans who discussed their efforts to safeguard democracy, empower citizens, and build more resilient democracies amid rising extremism, election interference, the spread of dis-/misinformation, and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Georgia’s civic activism in turbulent times

With the political crisis ongoing in Georgia, EED organised an event in June that brought together civic activists and journalists for a discussion on the state of civil society, societal challenges that have been amplified by the pandemic, and issues that unite people outside the capital, Tbilisi.

ADAPTING TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

EED supports activists in environments that range from transitional and restrictive to repressive and conflict. Contexts can change rapidly as political developments bring about democratic backsliding. EED's fast and flexible grant-making approach is vital in such circumstances, enabling it to adapt quickly to evolving grantee needs.

EED responds to requests for support based on needs and the country context. EED's stance is to be constantly open to new and innovative ideas on supporting democracy. This approach continued to prove highly valuable in responding to the various political crises of 2021 and during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, as civic activists and media outlets faced multiple and ever-evolving operational and financial challenges.

Trends and developments in 2021

While 2020 marked the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom,¹ 2021 was a year of further democratic backsliding in many countries. Seventy percent of the world's population now live in either outright non-democratic regimes or democratically backsliding countries, compared to 46 percent ten years ago.² Governments around the world have adopted new laws and practices to further reduce civic space and media freedom, a phenomenon that has gained momentum during the ongoing pandemic.

There is an even greater need for accountability, monitoring, and reporting today than ever before. Covid-19 has put additional pressure on civil society and independent media. Issues such as preserving civil liberties and ensuring proper and trustworthy information during a pandemic are high on democracy actors' agendas.

There were elections in many countries where EED operated this year, including Russia, Morocco, Moldova, Armenia, Algeria, Israel, and Kosovo.* Following the election of Maia Sandu as president of Moldova in late 2020, the 2021 parliamentary elections saw her former pro-democracy party win a clear mandate. Elections in Russia, on the other hand, were marked by a severe clampdown on the opposition, civil society, and independent media. Local elections in Georgia in October 2021 brought about yet more political polarisation.

Despite such challenges, 2021 has seen a renewal of civil society, as new actors are emerging, often volunteer-led and rooted in their local communities. These grassroots initiatives are born of a passion for change and a desire to respond to specific local needs. Often these movements are located outside capital cities, in regions overlooked by the donor community and wider civil society. In the media, many non-standard actors such as bloggers and citizen journalists ensure coverage of political developments. Increasingly, pro-democracy actors co-operate in-country and cross-regionally. Many of EED's grantees are part of this new civic movement.

48%

of 'rapid response' grants are focused on Eastern Partnership region



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

ADAPTING TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Transitional environments

Some countries where EED works provide a generally non-restrictive environment in which EED grantees can work openly, without the threat of direct repression or limits on their activities. These are also countries where donors can operate and are broadly welcomed by governments.

There are, of course, still democratic challenges in such environments, such as the absence of strong institutions, weak governance, a lack of accountability and transparency, high levels of corruption, an under-developed political culture, and barriers to political participation, as well as infringements of media freedom and the constant risk of democratic backsliding. Crises linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, conflicts, and persisting political turbulence have, in many cases, overshadowed and slowed the pace of reform. Civil society and independent media play important roles in addressing these challenges and acting as watchdogs.

In **Georgia** and **Armenia**, the fledgling democracy movement has faced significant challenges during the past year, with new limitations on freedom of assembly and speech in Armenia in particular. In **Ukraine**, the risk of democratic backsliding remains very real and the continued influence of vested interests on the political agenda affects the country's capacity to modernise.

In **Tunisia**, civil society continues to grapple with creeping authoritarianism following the president's decision on 25 July to lift parliamentary immunity and suspend the parliament in what many have called a *coup d'état*.

The recent period has been challenging in the **Western Balkans**, with a noted decline in democratic freedoms and increased corruption and nationalism in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Serbia** in particular. However, the region has also experienced a significant growth in grassroots initiatives, often centred around environmental issues.

Restrictive environments

Many EED grantees work in restrictive environments where there is limited space for civic activism. Corruption in such contexts is widespread and the rule of law is weak. While there is typically some level of open pluralism in governance, elections are marked by irregularities, and opposition parties and candidates face significant pressure. Media can easily fall foul of powerful patronage systems linked to political and economic interests, and there are often restrictions on democracy activists and donors who provide support.

In **Morocco**, activists can face repression, prosecution, and imprisonment for their work, and they operate in a challenging legal environment, where organisations' legal status can be denied or revoked at any time.

In **Turkey**, the legal, political, and economic environment for civil society and independent media remains challenging and activists play a vital role in pushing for democratisation agendas and offering unique spaces for resistance and free expression.

Repressive environments

Around a third of the countries where EED operates are under openly repressive regimes, where governments do not allow or actively obstruct civil society from engaging in political processes. In such authoritarian regimes, there is often no political pluralism and activists run a high risk when engaging in pro-democracy work, many facing imprisonment. Often too, the media is controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime, donors are blacklisted, and recipients of foreign funding are intimidated and publicly delegitimised.

An important part of EED's mandate is to provide flexible support to such activists. EED ensures that grant-making is discreet and safe and that grantee identities are protected, and also supports initiatives in exile, as these groups maintain strong networks inside their home countries.

The situation in both **Russia** and **Belarus** deteriorated significantly during the year. Civic activists and independent media in **Russia** were subjected to an unprecedented level of pressure during the electoral period and the stigmatising and restrictive Foreign Agents Law meant that many independent voices felt obliged to flee the country. While in **Belarus**, the regime systematically repressed all civil society, sentencing activists to lengthy prison terms and closing hundreds of organisations and independent media outlets, forcing thousands into exile.

In post-war **Azerbaijan**, although there is a new rhetoric around political reform and transparency, repression against civil society and the opposition remains, albeit on a smaller scale than previously. New media legislation passed in December is further curbing media freedom.

In the MENA region, **Algerians** experienced a systematic repression of the Hirak movement that erupted in 2019 and all those who support it. Life for **Egyptian** citizens is ever more grim, as the state apparatus has engaged in a relentless campaign to control and limit all forms of peaceful dissent and dialogue in the public sphere, including arrest, trials on trumped up charges and torture. Tens of thousands of government critics, including journalists and human rights defenders, remain imprisoned on politically motivated charges

The situation in the **occupied Palestinian Territories** has also deteriorated, with the eruption of violence in Jerusalem, Gaza and elsewhere during the year. There were mass protests following the forced expulsion of Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem, rockets were launched by Hamas affiliated military groups, and a fierce Israeli military operation in Gaza killed hundreds and maimed thousands more.

Conflict environments

EED's flexible funding mechanisms enable it to continue to support civil society and independent media in conflict environments that are off-limits for other donors due to security concerns and operational challenges. Many activists within these countries show remarkable resilience and a commitment to continue working for more democratic societies despite living in harsh conflict conditions.

EED supports activists in **Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Yemen**, all regions of lengthy conflict, many of whom are featured in this report. Civil society actors and independent media in these countries work in precarious conditions and assist people to address their daily challenges, and are building alternative narratives based on democratic values.



Caption

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EED's THEMATIC AREAS OF WORK

The following sections take an in-depth look at the work of EED partners during 2021 across the various thematic areas of operation.

The work of democracy activists from a range of different countries and environments is profiled in this section of the report, as well as that of media outlets and journalists defending free speech and media freedom. While the contexts that these activists operate in are all very different, they are united by their determination to build better and more democratic futures for their countries.

Incognito profiles

As many EED grantees work in difficult and repressive environments, their safety is always of paramount concern. Often, activists' work is politically sensitive. Some would face serious repercussions if it were publicly acknowledged that they had received international funding for their operations. EED adopts procedures to ensure their anonymity when providing grants to these organisations and individuals. In this section, anonymous profiles of such activists have been included with details on their work defending the human rights of vulnerable populations, protecting the rights of the LGBTQI+ community, and driving environmental initiatives.

Alumni success stories

An important part of EED's mandate is 'supporting the unsupported' and providing grants to often-unregistered groups and activists unable to access other EU democracy-support programmes or donors. EED invests time coaching grantees, helping to build their organisational and programming capacity so that good ideas can be transformed into functioning organisations. This includes helping grantees navigate the often-complex wider donor landscape and assisting them to present viable applications for funding from other donors.

To demonstrate this aspect of EED's added value, we include some EED 'alumni' in this report — individuals and organisations that received support from EED in the crucial early days of their development and are now flourishing.

I. ANTI-CORRUPTION AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Corruption is a major barrier to advancing democracy, destroying public trust in institutions, jeopardising sustainable development, and the rule of law. EED supports activists who tackle corruption and promote public accountability, transparency, and citizens' oversight of governance.

EED's added value in 2021

EED supports a variety of partners across the European Partnership and beyond who are demanding accountability of their governments and institutions, exposing corrupt practices, and seeking to develop anti-corruption cultures within their societies. EED adds value by providing funding to new activists and organisations with little access to other donor funding due to difficult legal environments, government repression, or other political or security concerns.

This section of the annual report profiles initiatives from Palestine, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Georgia. While these organisations represent a broad spectrum of interests, they are united by a conviction that pervasive corruption undermines the core values of democracy.



PROFILE

Abeer Musleh and Nazaha: Building a culture of accountability in Palestine

A Ramallah-based NGO is building a culture of accountability among young Palestinians. There are already signs of a change in mentality among young people increasingly critical of corruption.

“Integrity. Transparency. Accountability.” Abeer Musleh, founder and executive director of the **Palestinian Academy for Integrity**, or **Nazaha**, constantly repeats this mantra. She believes that Palestine’s future depends on these three words. She is even optimistic.

Musleh’s experience of lecturing at West Bank universities convinced her of the importance of founding Nazaha.

“Everyone knows that corruption is a huge problem in Palestine, but when I started speaking to the students about accountability and transparency, they laughed. By the end of the programme, I could see a real change in them. They understood the topic and had acquired more awareness of the issues. They believed that it is possible to address corruption. This is why we decided to found Nazaha,” she says.

According to AMAN, the Palestinian anti-corruption body linked to Transparency International, 72 percent of West Bank residents and 37 percent within the Gaza Strip believe that corruption is a significant issue for Palestinian Authority institutions, with the most common forms of corruption identified as *wasta* or nepotism, embezzlement, and abuse of position.

Nazaha fills a particular niche within the Palestinian anti-corruption landscape. Founded by a diverse group of people, including academics, civic activists, and business leaders, it is quietly building an anti-corruption culture in Palestine, complementing AMAN’s work researching corruption and punitive action.

Musleh and her colleagues at Nazaha espouse a value system that spurns nepotism and favouritism, encourages whistleblowing about corruption, and safeguards public money. They are working with Palestinian universities, colleges, and schools to instil these values through training and educational courses on good public governance, as well as providing specialised training to staff from Palestinian ministries.

Nazaha has also co-developed a toolkit entitled ‘How to fight dangerous aspects of corruption’, for ministries and other non-governmental associations. With EED’s support, they recently developed a second toolkit focused on local government bodies.

They also recently launched *Nazaha Magazine*, whose first edition focused on issues of transparency and accountability related to the Covid-19 pandemic and contained updates on recent court rules and legal interpretations of new legislation.



“Everyone knows that corruption is a huge problem in Palestine, but when I started speaking to the students about accountability and transparency, they laughed. By the end of the programme, I could see a real change in them. They understood the topic and had acquired more awareness of the issues. They believed that it is possible to address corruption. This is why we decided to found Nazaha.”

Abeer Musleh (Nazaha)

I. ANTI-CORRUPTION AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY



SmartGov: A technology-led NGO transforming local government in Lebanon

The founders of **SmartGov**, an ICT start-up and NGO in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli, are developing innovative e-governance tools to enable citizens to have a greater say in local government, helping to bring about a culture of transparency and accountability. SmartGov was launched thanks to EED seed-funding.

“Technology offers new ways of eliminating corruption and improving transparency within government and ensuring civil engagement. Our solution digitalises all aspects of municipality operations, ensuring transparency and live-streaming expenses in real-time,” says co-founder Ihab Hallab.

The SmartGov app has been designed to be easy to use. Any citizen can upload photos pinning them on the map, and they can see in real-time how the municipality deals with complaints. The app includes e-forms, allowing citizens to apply online for services such as licences and certificates, reducing paperwork.

SmartGov plans to roll out the technology to other local governments and start working on a national level.

Governance Monitoring Center: exposing corruption and misspending of public funds in Georgia

In the four years since its establishment, policy watchdog **Governance Monitoring Center (GMC)** has become a social media sensation in Georgia. Its Facebook page **Squander Detector** has more than 35,500 followers, a significant number in a country as small as Georgia, and it regularly posts infographics and short updates on corruption and mismanagement of public funds.

This social media fame motivated GMC to officially register as an organisation. It is now a well-established and respected NGO within Tbilisi’s civil society that monitors public sector corruption and misspending and works

closely with the media to publicise its findings. EED funding allowed GMC to extend its monitoring activities to other regions, opening two offices in Batumi, Georgia’s second-largest city, and Chiatura, a Soviet-era mining centre with a dismal record on corruption and environmental protection.

GMC’s director, Zaza Abashidze, was recently appointed board member of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), the main public media organisation in Georgia. This is a major coup for GMC, as it allows him to monitor how public funding received by the GPB is spent and ensure that content produced by the broadcaster is fair and balanced.



Al Bawsala: Holding the parliament accountable in Tunisia

Founded ten years ago, just after the Tunisian revolution, **Al Bawsala** wants to put citizens at the centre of political action. One of their first projects was to publish the names and pictures of members of parliament (MPs) on its website to let people know who was representing them. They also included MP absences, presences, and voting decisions.

“The goal was to hold politicians accountable and to enable people to make more informed political choices,” Al Bawsala’s Executive Director Nesrine Jelalia says.

Al Bawsala has four monitoring projects – the parliament, the state budget, local municipalities, and transitional justice. They make all information accessible to every citizen. Each project has its own website and they provide live-streaming of plenary sessions and information on local and national budgets. In November 2020, following an increase in police brutality, Al Bawsala created a website for citizens to report acts of police violence.

With 29 staff members and more than 180 volunteers, Al Bawsala has built a reputation as a trustworthy watchdog of state activities, with over 250,000 followers on both its Twitter and Facebook accounts.

EED funding helped the organisation ramp up its monitoring and communications activities during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure that the government would not abuse its emergency powers.

Al Bawsala has continued its monitoring work despite the ongoing crisis in Tunisian politics since the suspension of Parliament ‘until further notice’ on 25 July. This action and ongoing questions about the decentralisation process, including the decision not to appoint a dedicated ministry in charge of local affairs, have meant that Al Bawsala is adapting to address emerging challenges.



II. INDEPENDENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

A free media has always been considered an essential part of democracy, with journalists holding authorities to account, exposing corruption, informing citizens, and providing platforms for debate and shaping opinions. EED supports a broad range of media-based projects, including small start-up initiatives and larger professional outlets, providing funding unavailable from other donors.

The 2021 World Press Freedom Index showed that journalism is completely or partially blocked in 73 percent of 180 countries ranked by Reporters Without Borders.³ The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to this situation. Many governments block access to information about the pandemic and there has been a surge in public mistrust in the media, with the world experiencing an ‘infodemic’ of mis-/disinformation. In many countries where EED operates, media outlets have also suffered a collapse in advertising revenue.

There has been a sharp decrease in media freedom in recent years in many countries worldwide. **Russia**, in particular, saw a muzzling of independent media in 2021, with journalists declared ‘foreign agents’, media outlets closed, and media actors forced to leave the country to continue working. **Egypt, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Syria, and Algeria** are dangerous countries for journalists, with many facing repression and imprisonment. Similarly, in **Libya**, most media are funded and controlled by parties to the conflict, there are few independent outlets, and journalists work in a highly volatile environment.

EED funding to Independent media

81%

of grants provided to independent and social media take the form of institutional funding. This support is vital to enable these media to stay operational.



There has also been a noted decline in media freedom across the **Western Balkans**, with frequent self-censorship, intimidation against journalists, and the majority of non-state media controlled by commercial and political interests. The situation in **Serbia** is particularly concerning.

EED’s added value in 2021

Over 45 percent of EED’s grants are provided to media organisations, with EED funding all types of media, from TV stations, both satellite and web TV stations, radio stations, online media outlets, to bloggers, vloggers, podcasters, and YouTubers. EED frequently provides core funding to these outlets, which is essential in the current pandemic environment, given the collapse of advertising revenue and economic crises in many contexts.

This section profiles a wide variety of media outlets in Sudan, Georgia, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Serbia.



“It was important that we were everywhere. There was so much happening. Daily protests, briefings from the opposition, statements from the government, parliamentary meetings, press conferences of experts. We covered it all. We broadcast from morning to night, using our cameras if our phones were not working. We never stopped streaming.”

Kaiyrgul Urumkanova (Govori.TV)

PROFILE

Govori.TV: Kyrgyzstan’s first online television station

A dynamic and experienced journalist, Kaiyrgul Urumkanova, is at the helm of one of Kyrgyzstan’s most exciting media outlets, an online television station setting new standards in broadcast journalism in this Central Asian country.

In October 2020, mass protests broke out in the Kyrgyz capital following parliamentary elections that were plagued by allegations of vote rigging, at a time when the country’s economy was in free fall. *Govori.TV* live-streamed events to viewers both in and outside the country.

“It was important that we were everywhere. There was so much happening. Daily protests, briefings from the opposition, statements from the government, parliamentary meetings, press conferences of experts. We covered it all. We broadcast from morning to night, using our cameras if our phones were not working. We never stopped streaming,” says Urumkanova.

Govori.TV logged as many as 100,000 viewers each day during this period, as people sought out its independent coverage of events.

Founded in 2018, thanks to EED seed-funding, as Kyrgyzstan’s first internet television channel, *Govori.TV* has built up a strong team. Urumkanova has spent considerable time training her team in international professional standards of journalism.

Govori.TV is now a multimedia information agency with its own TV station broadcast from its website and social media platforms. It produces talk shows, interviews and discussion shows, and investigative documentaries, and has developed several multimedia projects.

In 2019, the station won the prestigious Central Asian MediaCAMP award in Tajikistan for its investigative news report on the role played by Kyrgyz security officials in the release of a high-profile mafia criminal in 2013.

Govori.TV runs ongoing training for young journalists and, with EED funding, has run leadership workshops for dozens of activist women from outside the capital city. Many of these women took part in recent local elections, with a number of them elected to local authorities.

II. INDEPENDENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

PROFILE

Sudan Bukra: Censorship-free quality broadcasting in Sudan

In 2013, during a wave of violent protests against the Al-Bashir led government, a group of Sudanese telecommunications engineers began to think about a technical solution to circumvent media censorship. With national newspapers' editions seized, journalists arrested, and internet access cut across Sudan, there was no media coverage of unfolding events.

One of the engineers realised that the solution was satellite TV, a medium particularly suited to Sudan, where nearly 80 percent of the population of 40 million own satellite dishes, and where social TV watching is common, with people watching television in cafés, restaurants, and refugee camps. In 2015, Husam Mahjoub, Ammar Hamoda, and others took part in a short-lived satellite TV broadcasting venture, *Sudan Bukra* — or Sudan Tomorrow — that folded due to lack of funding.

In December 2018, as the internet was shut down once again, no national media reported on country-wide protests. As the crisis intensified amid the media black-out, a diaspora group led by Sudanese medics contacted the *Sudan Bukra* team and, after a flurry of fundraising, the station was relaunched in 2019 and began broadcasting from a European satellite provider.

This was a deliberate choice, according to co-founder Mahjoub “The security services had the capability to intercept communications and block broadcasting. We needed to broadcast on a provider that was outside the Sudanese government’s control.”

Giving a voice to all Sudanese

From the beginning, *Sudan Bukra* was conceived as a media channel that would give voice to all Sudanese, including youth, women and minorities, and it was founded on democratic principles.

“We wanted the channel to be open to everyone, no matter who they were, if they lived in refugee camps, or if they were intellectuals, even if their mother tongue was not Arabic,” Hamoda explains.

In the immediate aftermath of the 3 June 2019 massacre, *Sudan Bukra* came into its own. On that day, hundreds of peaceful protesters were killed and hundreds more were injured when security forces violently dispersed a three-month-long sit-in at the military headquarters in Khartoum. With the internet shut down and Sudan-based media heavily censored, *Sudan Bukra* was the only channel providing unbiased reporting on events on the ground 24/7.

“Protestors and the general public relied on us during those traumatic days. We began to see how we could use *Sudan Bukra* as a tool for the Sudanese people,” says Mahjoub.

Today, the station broadcasts 24/7 and it has a number of highly popular programmes. Programming includes shows focused on political analysis and commentary, interviews with prominent Sudanese – a show presented by Mahjoub – as well as sports and culture content.

Living up to brave ambitions

Asked if *Sudan Bukra* has lived up to its ambitions, both Mahjoub and Hamoda believe that the station is making a real difference.

“People trust our channel. We show the real Sudan. We show people’s lives: in the streets, on farms, in workplaces. They recognise themselves on screen. We are not an elitist channel. Many prominent journalists and commentators have written on the influence of *Sudan Bukra* – some even call us the channel that toppled al-Bashir,” says Mahjoub.

An EED grant now covers the station’s operational costs, which remain high. *Sudan Bukra* is one of the only independent media reporting during the ongoing political crisis in Sudan.

“Protestors and the general public relied on us during those traumatic days. We began to see how we could use Sudan Bukra as a tool for the Sudanese people.”

Husam Mahjoub (*Sudan Bukra*)



El Biro: Challenging taboos in Libyan society through visual storytelling

Ghady Kafala and Abubaker Albizanti founded *El Biro* to provide in-depth coverage and analysis of events as Libya descended into civil war, and to give a voice to women and minority groups forced to flee their homes.

“We wanted to focus on human rights, as these have collapsed in Libya as the years of civil war have taken their toll. Our vision was to develop a dynamic media that could have a real impact on young people and that was not just focused on hard news,” says Kafala.

El Biro’s emphasis from the beginning has been on storytelling, relating news in a highly visual and attractive manner using line drawings and infographics. There are now dozens of stories on *El Biro*’s website, many covering taboo subjects such as domestic violence, women’s rights, and questioning the wearing of the hijab, and others focused on marginalised communities. The team launched a series of podcasts focused on women’s issues, financed by an EED grant.

Kuest Media: Innovative video explainer journalism in Turkey

“Journalists and academics are a little like olive oil and water. They don’t mix. We’re trying to bring these two groups together, the knowledge producers and the marketers, and to reach out to people,” Medeni Sungur says to explain the mission of *Kuest Media*, Turkey’s first explanatory journalism platform.

Launched in March 2021, thanks to an EED grant, *Kuest* focuses on short explainer videos that educate and entertain, raising awareness of important public policy topics and individuals’ fundamental rights. They have published videos on issues ranging from police violence in Turkey, to the tenth anniversary of the Arab Spring, and women’s unpaid domestic labour.

During *Kuest*’s first six months, 700,000 people watched their videos and they reached one million on Facebook and Instagram.

“We know that our audience has a short attention span and we need to attract them as soon as they first click on our videos. What we do is ‘storify’ ideas. We speak in a personal way and the result is personal too. We establish a relationship with our audience, and we are building a community who wants to engage,” says Sungur.



II. INDEPENDENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Aramram TV: A pioneering web TV station in Jordan

Abdelsalem Akkad, a journalist with many years of international reporting experience, and fellow journalist Hams Rabah launched *Aramram Web TV* in 2008, along with Greyscale Films, the company that produces content for the online outlet.

At the time, there were no web TV stations addressing controversial issues such as identity, political freedom, or minorities in the Arab world, and *Aramram's* talk shows sparked lively online debates and provided a unique space for youth to engage in current affairs and societal issues.

Today, the web TV station has a wide range of programming, with shows on political, economic, social, and cultural issues. One of its most popular shows is the parliamentary watchdog '209 King Hussein Street', which was re-launched during the 2020 parliamentary elections. The show analyses and dissects new laws and raises awareness of the parliament's legislative and oversight roles and how they affect people's lives. EED provided core support to the station.

Radio NOR: A radio station in rural Georgia that is now a multimedia platform

It took nine years for Ararat Ttayan, from the small Georgian town of Ninotsminda, near the Armenian and Turkish borders, to obtain a public broadcasting licence. In this rural region, where most people speak Armenian and Russian, *Radio NOR* first won a BBC World Service competition to set up a community radio station in 2006.

As Ttayan waited for the station's licence, the former civic-education teacher and his team of volunteers recorded news and music programmes, which they burned onto CDs and distributed within the community. They used the town's loudspeakers to broadcast a daily news programme. When the internet arrived in the town in 2013, they set up an internet radio station.

Today, *Radio NOR* broadcasts eight hours a day and has become a multi-platform broadcaster with its own transmission tower. Its programming includes educational content with Georgian language classes, social campaigns on taboo topics such as bride kidnapping, women drivers, and the deluge of rubbish that fills local fields. It gives different political voices a platform during election periods. *Radio NOR* has become known as a station that makes change happen.

"We give society a voice — no one else does this. We talk about people's problems and we solve them. We reach out to all parts of our community and make sure everyone is involved," says Ttayan.





CoolnFresh Magazine: challenging taboos in Kosovo one meme at a time

During his final year of university, Fisnik Çerkini started *CoolnFresh Magazine*, an Instagram page to post memes he created for fun. Three years later, this page is now a media success story and the most influential alternative media in Kosovo.* It posts dozens of memes daily to its 120,000 followers, and is often featured on primetime in mainstream media.

CoolnFresh uses light-hearted memes to provide satirical commentary of news and political events in Kosovo, challenge societal taboos, and spark discussions of issues ranging from corruption and crime to sexism and racism. It became especially popular during the 2021 elections when it ridiculed everyone across the political spectrum.

An EED start-up grant allowed Çerkini to quit his job and work full-time on *CoolnFresh*, purchase filming equipment, and hire a team of content creators. “When I got the news of EED funding, I thought it was a prank,” he recalls. “I could not believe that a European organisation was interested in my memes. It gave me the motivation to improve *CoolnFresh* even more”.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of its young team – Çerkini is the oldest at 25 – *CoolnFresh* now also has a satirical news website and two video shows on YouTube.

Megaphone: A leading voice of change in the Lebanese mediascape

Before the October 2019 protests against the political establishment in Lebanon, *Megaphone* was a magazine run by volunteers; it posted several explainer videos on a weekly and monthly basis that attracted tens of thousands of views. Over the weeks of the protests, it began to post daily videos that went viral, quickly gaining hundreds of thousands of views.

“We were on the streets every day right in the middle of the demonstrations, and then in the evening we produced a recap of everything that had happened that day,” recalls Jean Kassir, co-founder and general manager of *Megaphone*.

Today, *Megaphone* is one of the region’s leading independent media. The platform tackles complex information in an accessible way, dissecting politicians’ speeches, revealing disinformation tactics, and giving a voice to a wide range of people, including youth and women.

Megaphone’s office was destroyed by the Beirut port blast on 4 August 2020, an experience that traumatised and galvanised the team. Their video, ‘The Silent Conspiracy’, highlighted how widespread corruption allowed the explosion to happen and pointed fingers at key officials to hold them accountable.

II. INDEPENDENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



Alexei Tulbure, Stela Jantuan, and Victor Ciobanu: Paving the way for a new democratic era in Moldova

Leading up to the November 2020 presidential elections in Moldova, which saw the victory of pro-EU liberal politician Maia Sandu, a trio of political commentators fronted a Friday evening talk show ‘Trigger’, analysing the latest news and picking apart the government’s actions. Trigger soon became one of the leading Russian-language programmes in the country.

“We wanted people to understand that our politicians must be held accountable, and as a people we have to demand this of them,” explains Alexei Tulbure, who fronts the show together with veteran activists Stela Jantuan and Victor Ciobanu.

During the previous parliamentary election campaign, the trio also produced ‘De facto’, a series of short videos addressing disinformation in Moldova and sparking discussions about socio-economic issues.

Tulbure, Ciobanu, and Jantuan see their work as vital for developing a political culture that crosses ethnic lines in Moldova. “We promoted the idea that we should not be divided ideologically along geopolitical and linguistic lines and that we needed to look for solutions that would benefit everyone, Russian or Romanian-speaking, pro-Russian or pro-European,” explains Ciobanu.

EED funding to Independent media

18%



of grants provided to independent media are for start-up initiatives. EED can fund registered and non-registered organisations, not usually able to access funding from other donors. Many EED start-ups have gone on to become highly successful media.



Acik Radyo: An independent radio station funded by its listeners

Acik Radyo is a fiercely independent exception in the Turkish media landscape that has been operating since the 1990s. It has no private owners, relying instead on funding from its listeners, a community united by the values of democracy and freedom of speech.

Over the years, the team has grown to include 19 paid staff members and more than 200 volunteer programmers and producers who use their expertise to serve the community of listeners and supporters.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns, the station continued broadcasting, fostering a sense of community among its listeners and keeping them company during their daily routines while confined at home. *Acik Radyo*'s audience grew significantly during this period, with a 30 percent increase in traffic on its website.

EED funding enabled the station to replace outdated equipment and hire a digital storyteller to write content, facilitating the station's shift to internet radio.

Acik Radyo sees itself as a radio station for all residents of Turkey, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, with the station focused on giving space to underrepresented groups and addressing topics usually not covered in the media — a commitment illustrated by its awareness-raising activities against climate change, which the station has conducted for more than 20 years. In December 2020, it was awarded the prestigious Prince Claus Award for this work.



II. INDEPENDENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



INCOGNITO PROFILE:

Hard-hitting investigative reporting

Walid Hamis* is a young and enthusiastic media professional who came to national prominence for his hard-hitting investigative reports in his home country exposing corruption at all levels of government. He has also led cross-border reporter teams and worked on the Panama Papers, the Paradise Papers, and other collaborative projects. International colleagues consider him one of the world's leading investigative reporters, but Hamis lives in a country where the authorities do not welcome investigative reporting and many journalists risk repression and imprisonment for their work.

EED provided Hamis with a start-up grant to set up a new online investigative-journalism media outlet focusing on local news in regions outside the country's capital that national and international media often ignore. He considers it essential to ensure that society is better informed on the issues that matter and that this information will help them make better choices for their future political system, social security, healthcare, and educational systems. The new media outlet, *Al'yawm**, is working with other international and local partners to publish its content and is available on a variety of social media platforms.

Hamis is now planning training programmes on investigative and data journalism for young, local journalists.

**The name of this person and their organisation have been anonymised to protect their identity.*



© Teyit

EED SUCCESS STORY — ALUMNUS



Teyit: countering misinformation in Turkey

In 2017, a group of young Turkish journalists applied for EED start-up funding to develop a fact-checking website to counter disinformation and fake news. Five years on, *Teyit* has become a grassroots media success story with 1.2 million followers on its social media accounts.

Teyit fills a major gap in a Turkish media landscape that is rife with disinformation, using a rigorous fact-checking methodology to debunk fake news – a process that can take from 30 minutes to three months depending on the complexity of the information.

The media outlet has also successfully fostered a sense of community with its readers through both newsletters and a Telegram channel where readers can send pieces of news they suspect might be fake.

At the onset of the pandemic, *Teyit* launched its ‘Covid-19 Post’ newsletter to counter misinformation about the virus and help inform individuals about protective measures. It also included entertainment pieces to read during lockdown. The newsletter attracted more than 10,000 subscribers, and *Teyit*’s social media reach almost tripled. The team is now working overtime to address the avalanche of disinformation about the virus and vaccines.

“Working here is hard enough given our polarised media landscape, where fact-checkers and journalists are easy targets. People from all sides of the political spectrum hate us, and Covid-19 made things even harder;” admits *Teyit*’s Head of Communications, Can Semercioğlu. Judging by the numbers of followers, many are grateful for this fact-checking work. This was particularly the case last summer when they posted information about devastating forest fires along Turkey’s Mediterranean coast.

Teyit also runs ‘The Factory’, a community incubator that seeks to address issues in Turkey’s information and media ecosystem, and includes anti-disinformation programmes aimed at teachers to help them improve students’ media literacy.

“Our work is motivated by social impact, and we approach disinformation as a systemic problem. Our success is hard to quantify. It develops gradually. We are building a culture of digital literacy,” says Semercioğlu.

The *Teyit* team hopes to begin co-operating with similar organisations outside Turkey in the future. “Disinformation does not stop at borders; it can easily cross them and destroy lives. Co-operation with international fact-checkers will help us stop that,” says Semercioğlu.

III. CIVIC ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION

Civic activism and engagement ensure properly functioning democracies where the rights and interests of all people are protected. EED provides flexible support to civic activists that is adapted to their constantly evolving needs.

Recent years have seen a global transformation of civic activism, with activists becoming increasingly innovative as many governments seek to limit civic and political space. This need to innovate is vital during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which has triggered anti-democratic restrictions and repression in many countries where EED operates.

Civil society has found new ways to mobilise and circumvent obstacles — in some cases by moving actions online, in others by finding new forms of protest. Mutual aid initiatives have multiplied as civil society organisations collaborate. There has been an expansion in volunteerism in Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, and the Western Balkans, and a push-back against disinformation. There has been a noted increase in online democratic forums, with social media used to connect citizens and inform them about their rights, governance, political processes, and elections.

EED's added value in 2021

With a third of its funding provided for civic activism initiatives, EED supports both individuals and groups, many of whom face funding shortages or cannot access funding from other donors. EED works closely with these organisations to build their capacity, and many become highly successful organisations in their own right.

A subsection on the **Environment** is included this year. It highlights some of the many grassroots organisations supported by EED that work on this issue.

Organisations from Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Tunisia are profiled in this section.

Sivil Sayfalar: A forum for civil society to be seen and heard

Inanç Misirlioğlu believes in a truly democratic and inclusive Turkish society. This conviction prompted her to found *Sivil Sayfalar* in 2015 with her colleague Emine Uçak Erdoğan as an independent civil society media platform.

Now living abroad, Misirlioğlu relates that, with civic space shrinking in Turkey, it has become more difficult for activists to operate. Many of her colleagues and friends are serving prison sentences, some risking lifelong imprisonment.

Sivil Sayfalar has responded to this challenge by bridging the gap between civil society and policymakers, the media sector, and the public. The platform uses podcasts, videos, social media, data visualisation, and fact sheets to

bring reports produced by civil society to the attention of journalists, and in turn it helps to bring together journalists and civil society organisations.

The organisation also runs capacity-building workshops for civil society groups to learn how to communicate their work better. This year, it organised a series of meetings between civil society organisations (CSOs) and political parties who work on women's issues, following Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing violence against women, on 22 March.



© Sivil Sayfalar

III. CIVIC ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION

Rabat Social Studies Institute: Building a think-tank culture in Morocco

When Saloua Zerhouni returned to Morocco after years of living abroad, she decided to bring the culture and tradition of think-tanks back to her country to contribute to institutional and societal change.

A university professor, Zerhouni co-founded the **Rabat Social Studies Institute (RSSI)** with like-minded colleagues sharing the values of democracy, inclusion, and social justice. “We have political opinions, but no political affiliation. We are a proudly independent think-tank,” she says.

RSSI researches topics such as education, political participation, migration, and social inclusion, and recommends reforms to policymakers, working with them to bring about positive change.

“At the beginning, we had to approach the ministries and explain to them what think-tanks do and how institutions could benefit from their work,” explains Zerhouni. “Think-tanks were a new phenomenon in Morocco. Now they know us and value our opinion and analyses.”

Zerhouni lists Covid-19 and the shrinking space for public dissent in Morocco as the two main challenges for RSSI but considers that the think-tank’s approach of being critical without being confrontational has great potential and that it can continue to offer concrete and constructive solutions.



Center for Democratic Research: A student-led initiative providing transparency of the Turkish parliament

A student initiative that started as a project to raise young people’s awareness about parliamentary activities has set its sights high, as it seeks to provide an online resource of national and local Turkish parliamentary activities from the past 20 years.

The **Centre for Democracy Research (CDR)** began life as **Referendum** - a ‘Twitter for democracy’, as its founders describe it, an app informing young people of proposed parliamentary legislation and letting them vote on it in real-time. In 2021, the CDR ran a pilot project with the Izmir municipality, where local people logged issues that mattered

to them on a website, and the city collected this data and raised it in the local municipality. “It was direct democracy in action,” say the CDR’s founders.

Today, CDR has a sizeable social media following. It posts updates on parliamentary events and its research reports, which cover issues such as how LGBTQI+ people are represented in parliament and Turkey’s ratification of the Paris climate-change accords. CDR is determined to expand its dataset of all parliamentary activities since 1908 — an invaluable resource and the first-of-its-kind for academics, think-tanks, and the general public.

EED SUCCESS STORY – ALUMNUS



Humetna Association: engaging young people in Tunisia's civil society

Humetna, based in the northwest Tunisian town of Majaz al Bab, received a start-up EED grant in 2016 and a follow-up grant in 2017. Tarek Tookey, Humetna's director, explains that when the association was formed, young people felt disengaged from politics and abandoned by politicians, and many had joined extremist Islamic groups. There were no outlets for potential youth leaders.

One of the association's first activities was to run a football tournament during Ramadan, where they brought different groups of young people together and held after-match talks in local cafés about democracy and politics.

Following the success of this tournament, Humetna began to organise weekly meetings with young people and local political representatives, helping to bridge the gap between young people and local leaders and empowering these youth to become leaders. Before the 2017 municipal elections, Humetna mentored some of these young people and several were elected to local municipalities.

Today, Humetna — which, as Tarek explains, means 'neighbourhood' in the Tunisian dialect — operates in several other regions. It is still a grassroots organisation that takes a bottom-up approach to politics, ensuring that local voices are heard and local politicians listen and act. This could mean implementing street-lighting or road-resurfacing projects or, in the case of one local town, removing tonnes of rubbish that had long scarred its landscape.

The association's latest project is the development of a social hub that will bring together local government, funders, and local organisations to provide a safe space for all members of society to discuss politics, culture, and other societal matters.

Tarek believes the root of Humetna's success lies in its close collaboration with the authorities and its relationship with local communities. He admits that the association has faced criticism from politicians in the past. "It's not easy to move forward and preserve democracy," he says. "It depends on being resilient and developing an understanding of each other. With roadmaps and planning, you can succeed."





ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIONS

Climate is the defining issue of our time. More and more communities across the world are mobilising as grassroots activist groups to prevent environmental damage in their communities.

This new wave of informal groups, often based outside capital cities and rooted in local communities, is an encouraging sign of civic participation around the world. For many, environmental activism is the first step towards further involvement in civil society and holding their governments to account on issues such as corruption and mispending public funds.

This section of the report includes stories of environmental activists in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine who are all creating a culture of environmental awareness in their local communities.

Gavigudet: Advocating for cleaner air in Rustavi, Georgia

Tinatin Maghedani admits that, for most of her life, she had little idea that Rustavi, her hometown, was one of the most polluted areas in Georgia. An industrial centre since the Soviet era, the city is home to around 50 factories situated on its outskirts, with only a few abiding by environmental laws.

Two years ago, Maghedani stumbled upon a Facebook post by the environmental organisation **Gavigudet** ('We are suffocating') that quantified the harmful emissions from the factories. She began by volunteering at Gavigudet, and then she left her well-paid job to devote herself to environmental activism full-time. She now heads the organisation.

"You don't realise how bad something actually is until you see it with your own eyes," she says. "This is why we organise visits to the industrial area for citizens of Rustavi."

Gavigudet monitors the air quality in Rustavi, posting its findings on social media to raise awareness among the local population. The organisation also advocates for legislative change among local and state authorities — and, thanks to EED funding, it is now monitoring the implementation of a governmental action plan that aims to improve air quality in the city.

With many people in the city employed at these factories, Maghedani admits there is a delicate balance between the need for better air quality and people's livelihoods. "We have never requested their closure," she explains. "We just want them to respect regulations so that citizens can breathe clean air."

This approach has contributed to Gavigudet's popularity in Rustavi. While the core team is a small group of five, many locals support the organisation voluntarily. Maghedani's family is even involved in Gavigudet now. Her mother is a team member, her father organised a tree-planting campaign, and the architect who helped design the green space for that campaign is now her husband.

As Gavigudet's reputation has grown, it has come to the attention of other environmental organisations in Georgia, who are keen to share experiences and work on joint projects. Today, Maghedani is focused on building a network of environmental organisations that can support each other to create a true culture of environmentalism and sustainable urbanism in Rustavi and beyond.



© Gavigudet

Zall Gjoçaj: Protecting a national park in rural Albania

Three years ago, the authorities approved construction of a hydroelectric power plant within the borders of the remote **Zall Gjoçaj** park that would change the course of a river that the local community had always used for agriculture and livestock, causing considerable environmental damage to the valley. While the construction company claimed it had consulted local villagers and that the project would not use the entire volume of water for energy production, it soon became apparent that this was untrue.

The people of Zall Gjoçaj felt they had little choice but to start protesting against the plant's construction, and they have kept up their protests ever since, despite intimidation from both the company and local authorities, often making four-hour

drives to Tirana to bring their plight to national attention. The community has also brought several local and national institutions to court to stop this damage to their homes, but these court cases have had little effect, and construction continues. Now they are ready for the next phase of their battle: presenting the case against the Albanian government at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

With corruption widespread in Albania, the community is also advising other rural communities who face similar problems, and many of them have now started their own protest groups inspired by the **Zall Gjoçaj movement**.



© Green Leaf

Green Leaf: Shaping Odesa's green future

Vladyslav Balinskiy was drawn to activism during the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine when, in May 2014, a fire at Odesa's Trade Unions House, caused by violence from pro-Russian separatists, left dozens dead. Balinskiy was in charge of writing a report on the tragedy.

"I realised that I couldn't be just an observer, I needed to be more civically engaged to prevent Russian aggression in my hometown," he says. With war raging in Eastern Ukraine, his battlefield became environmental protection, and he founded the NGO **Green Leaf** to advocate against illegal construction and protect historical sites in Odesa, bringing about a more environmentally friendly city.

Green Leaf's first campaign was a protest against removing trees from the city's historical French Boulevard. Then the team turned its attention to monitoring the use and potential misappropriation of public funds in infrastructure and renovation projects. Its analysis documented the embezzlement of public funds, and activists launched several criminal cases against the city officials. With EED's support, the NGO now streams city-council sessions on its website, ensuring that they are accessible to the public.

The team has faced pressure and even threats because of its work, but has won public support. Balinskiy notes that the attitudes of some local officials are also changing.



Pusti me da tečem: Protecting the Neretvica valley in Bosnia and Herzegovina from environmental damage

When authorities announced construction of a hydroelectric power plant by the river Neretvica in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2020, a group of local citizens immediately got to work. Ten days later, 1,500 people took part in a protest against the power plant. That action was the start of **Pusti me da tečem** ('Let me flow'), an activist group committed to preventing environmental damage in the Neretvica valley.

Pusti me da tečem launched several legal challenges, which revealed failures and a lack of transparency in the planning permission process. The group physically blocked access to

the construction site and opened a museum about the river, informing people about its importance for the local population. They also built dedicated swimming areas for children.

Pusti me da tečem has become a point of reference for environmental activism in the country, and its protests continue to attract huge crowds, including movie stars and singers who support the cause. For now, its efforts are paying off. The local authorities have provisionally revoked the plant's construction permit.

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND MONITORING

The rule of law and human rights are among the core principles of democracy. EED supports human rights activists who defend citizens, many of whom are increasingly vulnerable and lack legal protection. EED partners increase awareness and understanding of what human rights are and how citizens can react when their rights are being violated.

Human rights organisations are active in monitoring the human rights components of policies adopted by governments that are encroaching on democratic freedoms during the ongoing pandemic. However, with economies affected around the world, many activists are experiencing funding cuts at a time when they are most in need of support.

EED's added value in 2021

EED supports human rights defenders, lawyers, and activists to ensure they can continue to advocate for human rights in their countries and beyond. In many cases, this support is provided in difficult, repressive regimes, and EED's ability to provide discreet and flexible grants is crucial. This section profiles human rights organisations from Armenia, Jordan, Syria, and Palestine.



© Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights

“After the war, I felt hopeless. I thought there was nothing I could do. But I believe in the art of small steps. You can bring change to a small village, then a community or a town. Working with other organisations, we can achieve a lot.”

Gayane Abrahamyan (Article 3 Club)



© Article 3 Club

PROFILE

Article 3 Club: Counteracting narratives discrediting democracy in Armenia

A human rights organisation is reaching audiences throughout Armenia and the diaspora with its alternative education hub, providing space for public discussion about democracy issues.

Two things that define Gayane Abrahamyan are justice and action. In her distinguished 22-year career as a newspaper and television journalist, Abrahamyan admits she was consistently drawn to social justice issues. She eventually left journalism to become a human rights defender and, for a time, a parliamentarian. In 2016, she founded the human rights organisation **For Equal Rights**, also known as the **Article 3 Club**, which plays a crucial role in counteracting narratives that seek to discredit democracy.

In the aftermath of the recent Nagorno-Karabakh war, disinformation is rife in Armenia and a current prominent narrative is that democracy weakens national security. The Article 3 Club has created an alternative information platform to create new narratives and address manipulative content. “We try to show that democracy is the main guarantee for state security,” says Abrahamyan.

The organisation hosts public panel discussions, supports journalists producing quality, in-depth reporting, and organises festivals and camps for young people using its landmark café in the city centre as a training centre.

All this takes place against a background of extreme pressure. In December 2020, the premises of Article 3 Club were attacked, and Abrahamyan has received anonymous death threats. She remains committed to her work, even if she is sometimes discouraged.

“After the war, I felt hopeless. I thought there was nothing I could do. But I believe in the art of small steps. You can bring change to a small village, then a community or a town. Working with other organisations, we can achieve a lot,” she says.

Article 3 Club is working to overcome harmful gender stereotypes, domestic violence – a problem often overlooked by Armenian media – and children’s rights. The organisation provides mentoring, training, and financial support to journalists operating in Armenia’s most remote and neglected regions, encouraging them to report on their region and serve their community rather than leave for the capital.

“Since the 2018 Revolution, fake news and disinformation have been prevalent in Armenia, and most media outlets are owned by people connected to the previous undemocratic government. All civil society organisations feel small in the face of this unequal battle, but we have to carry on,” says Abrahamyan.

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND MONITORING



© Centre for Defending the Freedom of Journalists

Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists: Protecting media freedom in Jordan

The **Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ)** has defended the rights of journalists in Jordan for over 23 years. Founded by Nidal Mansour when legislation imposed new restrictions on the media and 13 media outlets were closed, CDFJ provides legal assistance and capacity building to journalists and issues annual reports on the state of media freedom in Jordan and the wider Arab-speaking world.

Today, media freedom remains highly restricted in Jordan, with gag orders frequently imposed on journalists. Recent legislation such as the Cyber Security Law of 2014 has further

constrained the media, and the 2015 amendment to Article 11 of this legislation means that citizens are also subject to legal attacks and imprisonment for their online activities.

CDFJ's campaign to repeal this legislation, 'Talking is not a Crime', came to international attention, and the centre faced pressure from the authorities to halt all of its programmes and activities and was prosecuted in court. An EED grant provided core funding to cover staff costs, allowing CDFJ to relaunch activities and develop a strategy to guide future activities.



Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights: Leading the way for civil society in northeastern Syria

The **Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights (FFHR)** was established in northeastern Syria in 2013, two years after civil protests against the regime of Bashar Assad erupted, as a way to respond to the local population's emerging needs.

Initially, most of FFHR's projects revolved around women's economic empowerment, children's protection, and public awareness of human rights. As more civil society organisations and NGOs were founded in the region, FFHR began to focus on issues related to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. It works actively to promote principles of non-violence, civic engagement, and human rights.

Advocacy is also an important part of the organisation's work. It helps mobilise citizens to pressure local authorities to ensure that legislation on civic participation complies with international standards. FFHR also publishes research, policy papers, and recommendations on best practices. It has now established a legal unit to monitor violations of freedom of association and defend affected organisations.

A decade after the beginning of the Syrian uprising, FFHR's General Director Medya Dhir believes that the organisation's work is crucial for building a new democratic society in Syria and as a mentor for others, especially at a time when international aid prioritises humanitarian aid over democracy support.

Hurryyat: Working to end prisoner abuse and torture in Palestine

Last June, Nizar Banat, a civic activist and outspoken critic of the Palestinian Authority, was killed in a brutal attack by Palestinian security forces. His death sparked furious protests against a regime that many see as corrupt and repressive and a puppet of the Israeli authorities.

The **Centre for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights 'Hurryyat'** is one of many CSOs that called for an independent enquiry into Banat's murder.

Hurryyat has three main aims: to provide medical assistance to prisoners in Israeli jails, secure the right of movement for Palestinians banned from travelling, and prohibit torture in Palestinian prisons. It works closely with the security services, "criticising them in a constructive way in order to develop a culture of accountability," as Hurryyat's Executive Director and co-founder Helmi Araj explains.

"There can be no future for the political system in Palestine without respect for freedom of expression and opinion, and, of course, the prohibition of torture. We say this to everyone: to the politicians, to the security services, to the media, and to the people," says Araj.



V. WOMEN'S CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women's empowerment and gender equality are essential to any democratic country. Enabling women to play a central role in civic life and democratic processes is an important part of EED's work.

In many parts of the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has represented a step back for gender equality and exacerbated the gender gap between women and men. After years of struggle to take part in public life, women in countries around the world have found themselves confined at home once again and cut off from the labour market. Gender-based violence has risen sharply during this period. Supporting organisations that advocate for women's rights is even more important at this time in order to build a true culture of democracy.

EED's added value in 2021

EED supports many women-led organisations working on gender equality and women's rights. These organisations help empower women, encouraging them to participate in civic and political life, in both cities and rural communities, and raise awareness of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Almost a third of EED-supported initiatives have a component related to gender equality. This report contains profiles of women-led organisations in Armenia, Morocco, Turkey, and Syria, as well as anonymous profiles of grantees who operate in a difficult environment.



“We wanted to reach out to these people who can actually push for change and make a difference.”

Cemre Topal (Adana Feminist Lawyers Initiative)

PROFILE

Adana Feminist Lawyers Initiative: challenging gender discrimination in the judicial system in Turkey

Cemre Topal became interested in women’s rights and feminism in her 20s after graduating from university. She soon decided to use her law degree to defend these causes and, with three other lawyers based in the city of Adana in southern Turkey, formed the **Adana Feminist Lawyers Initiative**, a collective bringing attention to gender discrimination in the courts.

For the past ten years, the organisation has defended victims of sexual assault and domestic violence and has worked on some widely publicised cases of women who killed their husbands in self-defence. EED funding is allowing them to pursue a new project: collecting instances of sexist and discriminatory language in court proceedings in Adana.

“The system always tries to put the blame on women,” explains Topal. “When a woman is raped, the courts find any excuse to reduce the sentence for male perpetrators, while women who commit crimes in self-defence do not benefit from the same leniency.”

The lawyers started looking at data from the Adana Bar Association databases to find instances of discrimination against women. “The data was already there, but no one was looking at it. All we had to do was to read, research, and analyse,” says Topal.

They published a report with their findings and distributed it to civil society organisations, media outlets, and the bar association. “We wanted to reach out to these people who can actually push for change and make a difference,” Topal explains. “Together with other organisations, we are also producing some data visualisation to make the report accessible to the general public.”

Adana Feminist Lawyers Initiative also conducts workshops with young lawyers to raise awareness of discriminatory language in legal proceedings, although the pandemic forced them to move these training sessions online. Topal admits it was harder to network and build connections through digital meetings.

She claims it is easier to build a network of lawyers who can work together to end gender-based discrimination in the courts in a city like Adana. Bureaucracy is less constraining than in the capital, and the city is small enough for lawyers to know each other. While society is conservative, it is also fairly cosmopolitan, with people of Turkish, Kurdish, and Arab descent living side by side.

Topal and her colleagues are now planning to take on greater challenges and will research gender-based discrimination in courts across Turkey, using data from local bar associations.

Sexual Assault Crisis Center: Helping sexual violence survivors in Armenia

According to UN statistics, one in three women in Armenia experience physical and sexual violence at least once during their lifetime. Set up in 2008, the **Sexual Assault Crisis Center (SACC)** in Yerevan is the only organisation in the country that provides psychological and legal support to survivors of sexual violence.

It is still taboo to discuss the root causes of sexual violence in Armenia, and victim-blaming is common. SACC’s activities are also informed by the centre’s director Tatevik Aghabekyan’s previous experience working with a women’s resource centre, where she was struck by how many women approached her reporting sexual assault and seeking assistance.

SACC set up a hotline for sexual assault survivors, and today it provides therapy sessions with a psychologist and accompanies women to the hospital for medical care and to the police if they decide to report a crime. A SACC lawyer is also available to represent survivors in court.

The centre is also working to challenge stereotypes about sexual violence in Armenian society. It organises workshops for women, children, and teachers and advocates for legislative changes. An EED grant covers the organisation’s rental and salary costs and helps it develop new collaborations and build the capacity of other NGOs in the region to support survivors of sexual assault.

INCOGNITO STORY

Brave activists empowering women

Fadel Ismael* lives in a country scarred by years of conflict. In this traditional and patriarchal society, few women participate in civic and political life, and gender-based violence is common. Survivors of domestic abuse are usually frightened of seeking assistance, and femicide is increasing, a situation exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic.

Fadel has experienced domestic violence first-hand, and this experience galvanised her to become an activist for women's rights. She founded her city's first refuge for survivors of domestic abuse and set up a hotline for vulnerable women. Her social media pages and training programmes are focused on educating women about their rights and encouraging more women to take part in public life.

Hiba Qaid* is another leading activist for women's rights and has founded several advocacy groups to assist vulnerable women. She also runs a feminist online media outlet. She has released a series of YouTube videos to educate women about their rights and feminism. Her most recent venture is musical; she and her colleagues are preparing an online musical feminist event.

Both Fadel and Hiba work closely with the popular youth outlet *Kalima**, which is well known in the country for its innovative and eye-catching coverage of political and societal issues not covered by the official media. Much of *Kalima's* journalism focuses on human rights violations, women's rights, and gender.

Fadel and Hiba and the team at *Kalima* have faced considerable harassment from the authorities for their work. They have been threatened physically and psychologically by the police and arrested several times. Most recently, Fadel was the victim of a vicious cyber blackmailing attack, a common ploy used against women activists when their accounts are hacked and intimate photos, often faked pornographic images, are released.

EED provided start-up funding to assist the partners in equipping their facilities, covering overheads such as salary costs, and running their operations. As part of its support, EED is helping the group to plan for a sustainable financial future and mitigate operational risks.

**All names have been changed to protect identities.*



© Equity and Empowerment

Al Mar'ah: Empowering women in rural Morocco

Founded in 2004 by five young graduates frustrated by the lack of opportunities for women in Al Hoceima, on the northern coast of Morocco, **Al Mar'ah Association for Development and Solidarity** advocates for women's empowerment in the region.

Al Mar'ah trains women in a wide range of skills, from reading and writing to sewing, and provides mental health and family planning support. The organisation liaises with the government to raise awareness about reproductive rights and conducts anti-bullying campaigns in local schools.

This has not been an easy task. "During the first few years we had to knock on every door to convince both men and women of the importance of women's rights. But now we have gained everyone's trust," says Al Mar'ah's president Hanan El Fakiri.

With EED support, Al Mar'ah is ensuring the launch of local authority Equality Committees in five districts of Hoceima. These committees were set up to increase gender parity and equality in a region where women's participation in society is very low. Al Mar'ah is carrying out training and information sessions, as well as advocacy on these issues.

Covid-19 represented a step back for women's rights in Al Hoceima. "After all we did to get women out of the house, now everyone had to lock themselves at home," says El Fakiri. Al Mar'ah provided local women with work opportunities, teaching them how to sew fabric masks, giving them a source of income during the pandemic.

Equity and Empowerment: bringing Syrian women together

The four founders of **Equity and Empowerment**, all of whom define themselves as feminists, decided to act when they observed the lack of attention to women's needs within the humanitarian response in Syria. They believed that if women were not present in the public sphere, as is the case in the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controlled region of northern Syria, they could play no part building peace and political processes.

Equity and Empowerment aims to bridge the gaps caused by ten years of war, engaging with women of different communities, bringing them together, and helping empower them. Their first project was with Druze and Sunni women, who joined a democracy and democratic-rights training programme. It also included practical assistance, such as lessons on updating and repairing mobile phones, so that outsiders cannot manipulate them for blackmail purposes. They also helped train these women as visual journalists, opening up new income opportunities. The organisation is now implementing a project in Idlib that encourages more women to become politically engaged in local government.

VI. INCLUSIVE SOCIETY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND GENDER IDENTITY

Discrimination and exclusion because of sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, or disability are all violations of human rights. In many countries, these and other under-represented groups face restrictions in exercising their democratic rights.

EED supports organisations working to end discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, or disability.

LGBTQI+ communities face particular challenges in many of the countries where EED operates. Some live in relatively free environments where civil partnerships and pride marches are a reality, while others live in environments where openly queer individuals are subjected to heavy societal pressure, discrimination, and even legal prosecution. Even in countries that are safer for LGBTQI+ individuals, the rise of far-right movements can pose a serious risk for them and their rights. EED's discreet support is vital in many contexts.

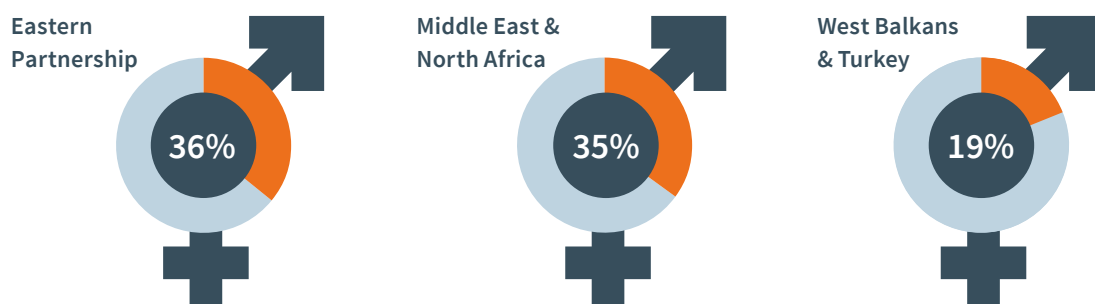
EED's added value in 2021

EED supports numerous initiatives that aim to raise awareness of the challenges faced by minority communities, including LGBTQI+ individuals, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

Much of this work is very sensitive, with activists often facing potential legal action. EED is committed to protecting the identity and privacy of many of our partners defending LGBTQI+ rights.

This report profiles two organisations from Montenegro and Serbia that have more freedom to operate than many other EED partners working on LGBTQI+ issues. An anonymous profile highlights the work of a grantee in a more repressive region. This report also includes the profile of a disability activist in Ukraine who is building an ability-focused mindset in his country.

Grants with a gender component* (ongoing in 2021)



* A grant has a gender component, if some element of the grant is related to fostering gender equality. Gender equality refers to the fostering of equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of different gender identities



Da se Zna! – A new platform recording violations of LGBTQI+ rights in Serbia

Established in 2016, **Da se Zna!** ('Let it be known!') is now one of the most developed LGBTQI+ activist organisations in Serbia, and one of the organisers of the annual Belgrade Pride Parade. It works to reduce levels of discrimination and violence against LGBTQI+ persons and contributes to the greater acceptance and integration of the community within Serbian society.

Such support is vital in Serbia, where there is much hostility towards the community, an atmosphere of impunity means that hate crimes against LGBTQI+ persons go unpunished, and the media is openly homophobic.

Da se Zna! has a team of lawyers, therapists, and activists who support survivors of violence and discrimination. They are one

of the only organisations in the country documenting cases of discrimination and other human rights abuses against LGBTQI+ persons. This data helps them put pressure on institutions to implement laws and regulations. Their successful legal cases help to empower the LGBTQI+ community. With EED's support, the team is now developing an online platform where individuals can make complaints and report unlawful treatment.

The organisation works closely with other pro-democracy actors and has helped establish a hub of 17 organisations around the country, ensuring that services are available to all LGBTQI+ people.



Montenegro Pride: Amplifying visibility for the LGBTQI+ community in pandemic times

In 2020, Montenegro became one of the first countries in the Balkans to legalise same-sex partnerships, an achievement that was mainly due to the advocacy work of LGBTQI+ organisation **Queer Montenegro**.

The NGO, which includes six staff members and more than 30 volunteers, has organised all nine Pride Parades in the country's capital, Podgorica, as well as seven Pride Weeks and a festival of queer art and culture including workshops, concerts, art exhibitions, and parties.

For the 2020 Pride, the group held a car parade, which

allowed participants to be socially distant. In 2021, those who wanted to participate in the parade, whose slogan was *Ljubav, ljudi* ('Love, people'), had to be vaccinated or present a negative PCR test.

EED support helped Queer Montenegro organise this ninth edition of Podgorica Pride in 2021 after the Covid-19 pandemic caused a shift in the funding priorities of donors. The parade ensured visibility for the LGBTQI+ community in Montenegro at a time when conservative right-wing movements are on the rise in the country.

The 2021 Podgorica Pride was also an opportunity for Queer Montenegro to ask the government to approve the last pending amendments to the same-sex partnership law so that it can be applied fully, allowing the LGBTQI+ community to enjoy all the rights provided by the law.

Dostupno: Empowering people with disabilities in Ukraine

Two years ago, Dmytro Schebetiuk was told by his swimming coach that he had to choose between his sporting career and his civil society work; he could not be a champion in both. He decided to abandon his dream of representing Ukraine at the Paralympic Games to focus on transforming the lives of people with disabilities.

Fed up with the lack of wheelchair-accessible public spaces, Schebetiuk began to publish reviews of restaurants and other establishments, explaining to owners how to make them more accessible and informing people about wheelchair-friendly locations in their cities. He produced humorous vlogs about life as a wheelchair user in Kyiv.

This work eventually led to the establishment of the NGO **Dostupno** ('Accessible'), which is working to change the perception of people with disabilities in Ukrainian society. The organisation gives awards to accessible establishments and administrative buildings. It also organises trips for people with disabilities, encouraging them to travel.

"Our aim is to enable these people to live fuller lives. I am not a hero because I go out on the street. I'm just a normal person going for a walk and I happen to be in a wheelchair," says Schebetiuk.





INCOGNITO PROFILE:

Podcasts revealing LGBTQI+ lives

Two years ago, Goran Dragić* published a series of interviews with LGBTQI+ international celebrities on his website and launched a series of podcasts based on these stories on his popular Apple Podcasts channel.

Following the success of these podcasts, and thanks to EED funding, he has now launched a new series focusing on the lives of LGBTQI+ people who live in his country. Individuals talk about their lives and work and the challenges they face. This podcast series aims to raise awareness of the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ people across his region and build a sense of community between the various communities. This approach aims to help them defend their legal rights and also seeks to address the sense of pessimism that many feel.

**This person's name has been anonymised to protect their identity.*



VII. ARTS AND CULTURE

Art and cultural activities can provide an unconventional yet effective vehicle for democratic change. Theatre productions, concerts, and satirical articles can become a tool for activists to criticise governments, make their voices heard, and include marginalised groups in public life.

EED's added value in 2021

EED assists individuals or initiatives that use traditional or innovative artistic expression to promote democratic values and freedom of speech.

EED supports a wide range of initiatives, from a platform for artists and intellectuals who promote freedom of speech to theatre groups and cultural hubs for marginalised youth groups.

Cultural activities and creative projects can become a gateway for individuals to get involved in civic life and play a more engaged role in democratic processes, and EED's flexible funding model means it can support these important projects.

This section profiles grantees from Moldova, Armenia, and Turkey, as well as an anonymous grantee.

PROFILE

Argonotlar: using art criticism to ignite debate on political topics in Turkey

Kültigin Kağan Akbulut has been passionate about movies and art since his teenage years, but an elective contemporary art course he took during his political science studies at university became his gateway to contemporary art criticism. "I discovered that art can open up debates on many topics, from nationalism to gender issues to urban problems," he says.

After graduation, Akbulut continued to focus on freelance writing for film and contemporary art magazines and was also involved in LGBTQI+ activism. Seven years ago, he started thinking about launching his own arts magazine; the problem was how to make it sustainable.

He began by building a community of readers through a contemporary art newsletter; his magazine idea launched in January 2021, when an EED start-up grant allowed Akbulut to transform this newsletter into an arts magazine, *Argonotlar*. The magazine has rapidly built up its profile and reputation as one of the only independent media covering the contemporary art scene in Turkey and analysing its political dimensions and relevance.

With almost 90 percent of articles either written by or featuring women and LGBTQI+ artists, *Argonotlar* puts the spotlight on artists often overlooked by the mainstream media. "LGBTQI+ activism is not just something we choose to focus on or have a policy about, it's who we are. We are always looking for the authentic arts moment; our focus is on queer art, small initiatives, things happening outside Istanbul," says Akbulut.

The magazine does not shy away from other sensitive issues, such as sexually explicit artworks or art calling out the Turkish government's treatment of the Kurdish minority. Artists who address anti-militarism, feminism, LGBTQI+, and social issues in their work often find themselves in a pro-democracy position and in opposition to the state.

"Contemporary art can be part of the political debate and this is why I love it. The state is afraid of contemporary art. It can broaden our perspective to a much more colourful space."

VII. ARTS AND CULTURE



Lautar: artists mobilising citizens around democracy

When Pasha Parfeny represented Moldova in the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest with his song ‘Lautar’, he could not have imagined the role he would play in helping to pave Moldova’s path to democracy. **Lautar** became the name of the NGO he founded as an anti-corruption initiative intended to inform the public about democracy issues and mobilise people to vote.

In 2019, as Parfeny and other artists were banned from performing in official venues due to their criticism of the then-government, they teamed up with prominent civic activists and stand-up artists, performing in cultural centres across the country and to diaspora audiences abroad, releasing a song that became a hymn of the democracy movement, as well as a series of online satirical sketches. In June 2019, Parfeny became directly involved in politics when he brought his sound system into parliament during a critical vote for the short-lived Socialist-ACUM coalition, allowing voting to occur despite a power cut.

Before the most recent elections, in 2021, Lautar once again toured the country and, in collaboration with Moldova’s Central Election Committee (CEC), held simulated voting exercises during concerts. “Nearly a quarter of the audience took part, especially children, and I was one of the three candidates. I’m quite sure these children made sure their parents voted on 11 July,” he says.



Political Café: A unique space of discussion and civic participation for Armenian youth

Talin is a small town in western Armenia, near the Turkish border, just an hour’s drive from Yerevan. Until recently, most of its residents travelled to the capital for work, studies, and leisure, as there was little to interest them at home.

This changed in the summer of 2020 when Narek Tutkhalyan opened Armenia’s first **Political Café** in Talin. Today, his café is a popular venue for young people to gather, meet with community leaders, and attend training programmes. All, of course, over a good cup of steaming *soorj* – the local coffee.

The café runs ‘Political Fridays’ where a speaker, often a prominent politician, speaks about the main news topics of the week. Political Café is also working closely with the local Yezidi community, informing them about local government and helping them become more engaged within Armenian life.

“I wanted to do something for Talin and its youth,” says Tutkhalyan. An EED grant helped his team transform an abandoned Soviet-era building into today’s modern café venue.

Tutkhalyan now wants to provide youth in other regions with the same opportunities as in Talin. He has opened another political café in the northern town of Ijevan and plans to open another in Ararat, in the south of the country.

INCOGNITO PROFILE:

A café for activists

When Marina Joksimović* decided to open a café in her small town ten years ago, this enterprising businesswoman would never have guessed that her café would become a hub for civic activism and corporate social responsibility. At the time, she wanted an alternative venue for people to meet.

Today, the café serves as an incubator for activism in the town, providing a safe place for citizens to meet and collaborate. The café's team includes people of different professional backgrounds who run mentorship and training programmes for citizens interested in starting their own projects. They also help foster cross-sectoral social partnerships between citizens, civil society organisations, businesses, and urban groups.

While the café still serves the coffee that initially made it popular, it also provides a venue for cultural events, debates, and lectures on issues of interest to citizens, such as climate change and urban management, literature festivals, and local clubs. It covers half of its costs from business services.

An EED grant has helped the café maintain the space as a civic hub, upgrading it to be Covid-safe, and it has also covered the costs of a studio where the team holds online events, conducts live broadcasts, and produces videos.

**This person's name has been anonymised to protect their identity.*





VIII. YOUTH

Building a solid culture of democracy in any country is impossible without involving local youth, educating them, and encouraging them to engage in civic activism.

Providing young people with the tools and knowledge to engage in civic and political activism and create a better future for themselves and their countries is an important aspect of EED's support and a common issue across many initiatives.

EED's added value in 2021

Youth-centred civic engagement initiatives include an array of innovative start-up projects ranging from leadership training for young people to providing space for youth empowerment and democratic governance to tackling political disaffection and promoting inclusion through sports and culture. This report includes profiles of youth organisations in Montenegro, Armenia, and Yemen.



Naša Akcija: Building a youth network in Kotor

Based in the coastal town of Kotor, Montenegro, **Naša Akcija** ('Our Action') is an NGO focused on providing local youth with volunteering opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The organisation teaches young people various skills, from gardening and cooking to public speaking and learning about human rights and democracy. It also provides professional development, guiding young people in preparing CVs and applying for scholarships.

Naša Akcija organises around 120 activities per year for youth aged 12 to 30, and many of these young people continue to be involved throughout their young adulthood, growing together with the organisation.

As special adviser Patricia Pabrić explains, the NGO uses a careful balance of working, learning, and having fun. "It's a myth that young people don't want to work. They do, but they want to feel valued and rewarded for their work," she says.

The formula appears to work, and Naša Akcija is now the go-to organisation when support is needed for any big event in Montenegro, from sports competitions to cultural festivals, at the same time as helping to form a generation of well-rounded young adults.

VIII. YOUTH



Youth of the World Together: inspiring and educating youth through social media

Nasser Almag, CEO and founder of **Youth of the World Together (YWT)**, believes in the power of social media to nurture connections. Over the past six years, he has built YWT into one of Yemen's most high-profile youth organisations. Thousands of young people now follow its media platform **Etreek24** ('Flashlight') on its various social media channels, including TikTok and Instagram.

With a focus on arts and culture, citizenship and human rights, media and technology, employment and entrepreneurship, YWT has always provided platforms to encourage young people to make a positive change in their communities; one of its most prominent events is a human rights film festival.

"We are trying to build a younger generation who believe in human rights and democracy," says Almag. With over 60 percent of Yemen's population under 25 and two-thirds of citizens requiring humanitarian assistance, he believes that the youth are the country's best hope for the future.

Restart Foundation for Science and Education: a driving force for educational reform

Born as a student movement, the **Restart Foundation for Science and Education** has become a driving force for educational reform and anti-corruption efforts in Armenia. The organisation was instrumental in the adoption of legislation establishing a new system for student self-government bodies within state universities.

University student councils were initially established to represent students and protect their rights, but they had evolved to become the only permissible institutional

platform for civic engagement and were closely aligned with the ruling party. The councils were often used to oppress students rather than protect them. For the Restart activists, reform in the universities was the first step in reforming other state institutions.

Over the past three years, Restart has developed into an active network with thousands of student members across the country. It organises annual camps, teaching skills not taught in Armenian universities, such as critical thinking, media literacy, academic freedom, democratic principles, and the rule of law. Its members were active in informing the public about the risks of the Covid-19 pandemic.





© Oblakoder

Oblakoder: A magazine by and for Serbian youth

Founded by young media professionals frustrated by the lack of paid opportunities in journalism, online magazine *Oblakoder* is quickly establishing itself as a voice for young people in Serbia, describing their challenges and achievements.

Oblakoder's main aim is to challenge how young people are portrayed in Serbian media. "We are usually either saints or devils, there's no in-between. We wanted to give a more nuanced

perspective," explains Marina Zec, *Oblakoder*'s editor-in-chief. The magazine has proved particularly popular among the 25 to 35 year-old age group. According to Zec, this is because the team focuses on writing about issues relevant to them, rather than just writing for clicks. That way, it engages in a dialogue that is usually absent in Serbian media.

An EED grant covers overhead costs and the purchase of equipment. Zec now makes a point of paying everyone; she is determined that a career in journalism can be accessible to young people from every socio-economic background.

34%

of grants with a youth component* are focused on civic activism and participation



25%

of grants with a youth component are for independent and social media platforms



*A grant with a youth component is a grant where youth are the main target group, and/or when the grantee is led by youth and is empowering youth.

ВМЕСТЕ
ДО
КОНЦА



FIVE MESSAGES FOR THE SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY

This November, ‘Five Messages for the Summit for Democracy’, supported by a leading group of global pro-democracy organisations and institutions, were launched on the occasion of the Summit for Democracy, organised by the Biden administration on 9–10 December 2021.

An EED-led initiative, the Five Messages were developed to inform the Summit for Democracy. All issues identified are of crucial importance for advancing democracy worldwide.

The Five Messages were launched a week before the Global Democracy Coalition Forum event, an online forum held over 24 hours on 7 December and consisting of webinars that brought together democracy organisations, activists, advocates, experts, academics, students, politicians, and thought leaders from all over the world to discuss the challenges, opportunities, and solutions to invigorate democracy worldwide.

To date, 14 global democracy organisations have signed up to support these Five Messages.

Introduction

The 2021 Summit for Democracy is a unique opportunity to remind us that democracy is ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people.’ It is only in a democracy that citizens can choose their government through regular, free, and fair elections, and that all citizens have the right to free expression of political preference and are guaranteed individual freedoms and rights.

Yet 2020 was the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom, as the world faced a perfect storm of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, increasing economic and physical insecurity, and violent conflict.¹ Seventy percent of the world’s population live in either outright non-democratic regimes or democratically backsliding countries, compared to only 46 percent ten years ago.²

At a time when many people talk of a crisis of democracy, it is more important than ever that democratic states work together to show global leadership and solidarity in defending and advancing democracy at home and abroad. The democracy support community is key to this process, particularly today when autocrats are increasingly exploiting democratic weaknesses in other countries to advance their interests.

Democracy assistance programmes support inclusive and credible elections, strengthen the capacity of local civil society actors to uncover corruption and defend basic rights, increase transparency, and hold leaders accountable. They bolster independent media within countries, often helping to keep these independent media alive, enabling them to play a critical watchdog role in society. They support human rights defenders and activists so they can continue to operate and be heard in their societies. They ensure that the political participation of women, people with disabilities, young people, LGBTQI+ people, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic and religious minorities, and other underrepresented groups is key to democratic processes and resilience.

FIVE MESSAGES FOR THE SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY

1.

Show solidarity with the world's democrats – Democracies must deploy resources more effectively to assist the citizens of autocracies and weak democracies.

When providing aid and assistance, **we shall support the development of democratic institutions capable of demanding accountability of their governments.** When corrupt, oppressive governments deprive their societies of their basic rights, we shall provide direct support to the society, civic organisations, and all pro-democracy actors. This is a paradigm shift from a government-centred to a society-centred approach.

We must **continue to support the development of inclusive, policy-based political parties**, given the central role of political parties as the gatekeepers to political decision-making and the development of policies that improve the lives of citizens.

We need **greater co-ordination in the distribution of support**, a greater focus on democracy in aid budgets and loan agreements, and guarantees of long-term support.

We must **work together to deter and defend against malign foreign interference in democracy.** This requires sharing lessons learned and best practices to develop a toolkit of solutions and **strategies to build resilient institutions, practices, and publics.**

We must **push back forcefully against illiberal laws that limit the ability of societies to organise**, stigmatise civil society, or hamper their ability to receive support from democratic partners abroad.

We must create **stronger relationships between democratic countries and institutions worldwide**, **going beyond** the 'transatlantic' space and urging all democracies to engage in democracy assistance.



2.

Renew international settings – Democracies must reform international institutions so that they reflect and promote democratic values.

We need **Special Rapporteurs or officers responsible for democracy** inside such organisations as the UN, the OSCE, the OECD, the OAS, and the African Union, with broad mandates to investigate and report on democracy deterioration.

We need to **challenge authoritarian regimes using international institutions to undermine human rights** and democratic values, promoting ‘sovereignty’ as the only ideal instead.

Every democracy should incorporate a **democratisation agenda into its foreign policy**, focused on strengthening and supporting democratic institutions in bilateral and multilateral relations.

We need **new institutions or we need to adapt existing institutions to co-ordinate the democratic world’s response to aggression by authoritarian states** (e.g. murders, hijacking, kidnapping).



©Mazineen Alrasheed

3.

Scale-up support to independent, ethical media and the overall information ecosystem to ensure access to accurate information while addressing mis-/disinformation – Democracies must promote independent, verified, and fact-checked information.



We need to create **dedicated, long term, and core funding mechanisms for independent public interest media**, targeted at journalists working inside autocracies and weak democracies, as well as at journalists working in exile.

We need to **develop policy responses for regulators that balance the benefits of the free flow of information and the dangers of false and unverified information**. Russia and China alone spend billions on internal and external propaganda. We need a more robust co-ordinated international response to counter this and other such propaganda around the world.

4.

Strengthen and support existing structures and encourage the creation of new structures and systems to enable greater transparency, accountability, and co-ordination among governments, technology companies, and civil society — Democracies must address the business models of internet platforms and algorithms that actively push harmful, violent content.

We need a **human rights-based approach to digital technologies for the responsible handling of data** and the open and free exchange of ideas. We have an opportunity and a joint obligation to develop, use, regulate, and promote technology for the benefit of democracy.

We must ensure that **technology companies do not facilitate authoritarian censorship** and we must play an active role in lobbying against any such action.

We need to enable **citizens to control their data and protect against abuse** by those who seek to influence them using that data.

We need to invest in **digital literacy to give citizens the tools to distinguish truth from disinformation, protect human rights, and participate constructively** in digital democratic activity.

We need an effective mechanism to ensure that democracy activists, human rights defenders, investigative journalists, and all vulnerable and marginalised voices **are not removed from social media platforms and that all individuals are protected from online abuse. Social media platforms complying with authoritarian states' censorship demands should face the consequences of not meeting democratic standards.**

5.

Put our own house in order – Democracies must restore their credibility.

We **must speak clearly and confidently on behalf of democracy** and defend the democratic norms and rights enshrined in international law and democratic constitutions.

We must ensure that **democracy is constantly inclusive** and that all members of society can participate equally within the democratic process, including women, those with disabilities, young people, LGBTQI+ people, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic and religious minorities, and other underrepresented groups. We must share these experiences to constantly strengthen assistance approaches.

We **must speak in unison where democratic values are at stake**. The commitment to these challenges must be clear and verifiable, and tangible action must back up our words.

We **must address corruption and confront kleptocracy**. The world's autocrats cannot continue to use the global financial system to hide and launder stolen money.

We **must recommit to democracy at home**, including by ensuring that elections uphold key international standards and obligations and have credible and transparent results that foster public trust.



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BIG TECH AND CIVIL SOCIETY



Beyond censorship: how big tech business models challenge pro-democracy online activism

The fourth of the 'Five Messages for the Summit of Democracy' **calls on democracies to address the business models of internet platforms and the algorithms that push harmful content.**

It notes the imperative to strengthen and support existing mechanisms and to ensure the creation of new structures that can support greater transparency and accountability, and better coordination between governments, technology companies and civil society.

Digital activism: a double-edged sword

Digitalisation and the advent of social media have revolutionised civil society, empowering activists and helping them to reach out to previously unimaginable numbers of people across the globe. This power has come at a cost, as activists also struggle to protect their online security and privacy and are frequently victims of online censorship, abuse, defamation and forcible removal from the very social platforms they rely on for their activism. Many EED partners have had such experiences.

It took two whistleblowers in 2021 for the world to finally pay attention to what civil society actors across the world had been trying to say for years. They accused Facebook (Meta) of knowingly hosting hate speech and illegal activity and of ignoring inauthentic behaviour, trolling, character assassination and biased takedown requests.

A new EED-commissioned scoping paper, summarised below, identifies some of the key challenges faced by civil society actors in this digitised world.

Challenges facing online activism

The Electronic Frontier Foundation's report¹ found that **platforms' overreliance on machine learning algorithms is highly problematic.** These algorithms are closely guarded secrets, yet it has been proven that Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems are no less biased or scaled than human beings, particularly when technology cannot be adjusted to languages other than English.

In some countries, particularly in more repressive regimes, **governments label independent civil society organisations and actors as foreign agents or terrorists and demand that platforms remove their content** or shut them down altogether. This was the case on 15 September 2021, when Apple and Google removed Alexey Navalny's 'Smart Vote' app, caving into pressure from the Russian authorities. Facebook's Dangerous Individuals and Organizations list, revealed in October 2021, particularly affects the MENA region, with evidence of a suppression of Palestinian expression and content.

Existing tools fail to distinguish between fair and balanced reporting and misinformation. There are no safeguarding mechanisms to prevent account suspension, and journalists who work for smaller media outlets are given little attention. At the other end of the spectrum, platforms fail to react when content poses a clear threat.

It is **almost impossible for activists, journalists, human rights defenders or individuals to communicate with real individuals representing social media platforms.** There is a lack of transparency on often arbitrary decisions taken by platforms, yet content governance decisions affect human rights across the world.

There are **limited mechanisms for activists to argue their case with platforms.** Some call on human rights and international organisations for help; others rely on their personal popularity or positions to argue their case with platforms. Another option is the Santa Clara Principles on Transparency and Accountability in Content Moderation, launched in 2018 and re-iterated in 2021, and endorsed by major companies such as Apple, Facebook, Google and Twitter.

¹ <https://www.eff.org/wp/caught-net-impact-extremist-speech-regulations-human-rights-content>

BELARUS UPDATE 2021

From a sense of renewal to draconian repression

August 2021 marked the first anniversary since the eruption of mass protests in Belarus following fraudulent presidential elections. In 2020, the authorities responded with a harsh crackdown, violently repressing protests, arresting tens of thousands, and there were hundreds of reports of torture of detainees while in police custody.

Over the past year, the regime has systematically suppressed political resistance, freedom of thought, civil society and digital freedom. Anti-extremism legislation has been used to outlaw opposition media, civil society and political activists, making it illegal for society and business to support them financially or for citizens to even follow online. As Lukashenka embarked on what he labelled a 'purge' of civil society, over 280 civic, political and media organisations were forcibly closed and stripped of their registration. By the end of December, there were nearly 1,000 political prisoners behind bars, 30 percent of them women and girls.

Many prominent activists and opposition figures received lengthy sentences in 2021. These included: Viktor Babaryka, opposition presidential candidate (14 years); Syarhei Tsikhanouski, husband of Vilnius-based opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (18 years); Maria Kalesnikava, one of three women to front the opposition campaign and winner of the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize (11 years); Maxim Znak, a member of the coordination council formed by opponents of Lukashenka; bloggers Eduard Palchys and Ihar Losik (13 and 15 years respectively), to name but a few.

Belarus is now the most dangerous country in Europe for journalists. Over 500 media professionals were arrested during the year, with 32 still behind bars at the end of December. Media giants including *TUT.BY*, *Belsat TV channel*, the *BelaPAN* news agency, *Nasha Niva* and *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty* were officially declared extremist, and any Belarusians posting their content face fines or jail sentences of up to 15 days. Many websites are now blocked, including those of the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) and PEN Belarus. Even journalists in exile are fearful, particularly since the May hijacking of a Ryanair flight *en route* from one EU state to another, and the arrest of journalist Raman Pratasevich and his partner, Sofia Sapega.

During the autumn, Belarus began trafficking migrants towards Poland as pawns in a high-profile political standoff with the EU. The authorities were accused of increasing the number of flights from the Middle East to lure would-be migrants hoping to travel to Europe, sparking a humanitarian crisis as thousands were stranded for months in make-shift camps at the border.

It is estimated that at least 100,000 people fled Belarus during the year, with 1,600 granted political asylum in other countries. These include IT professionals, medical doctors, as well as activists. The government has responded to this exodus by imposing new restrictions to prevent people from leaving the country, with this legislation ostensibly introduced due to Covid-19.

A changed protest movement and political opposition

The pro-democracy movement has demobilised in the face of this mass repression, and dissent has moved underground. Despite this, the 2020-21 stand-off has fundamentally changed mindsets. A new reform-minded civil society has emerged over the year, one that is economically empowered and politically aware, and includes representatives from a wide variety of professions, unions, political organisations and local communities, many of whom were not previously involved in activism. Working in partnership, civil society members provide support to victims of repression, organise small local protest actions, and run secure digital chats and online communities.

Today, most opposition leaders remain in exile, with two leadership nuclei in Vilnius and Warsaw. Some key Belarusian media outlets have also relocated abroad where they continue reporting through Telegram and other social media channels.

EED support to Belarus

EED support to Belarus remained crucial throughout 2021, with EED assisting civic and political activists and independent media both inside and outside the country. EED facilitates donor support to Belarus via the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, acting as a basket fund to support this initiative.

VOICES FROM BELARUS

Zhanna, an activist, arrested in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential elections, spent nearly a year behind bars. She now lives in exile.

“Anyone can be arrested in Belarus today. It’s no longer activists and journalists who are at risk. Lukashenka is determined to hang onto power by any means, and he will stop at nothing.

I spent over eleven months in pre-trial detention. I was one of eight incarcerated in a small prison cell. There were four bunk beds, with a narrow 8-centimetre corridor between each bed. We had to wash ourselves and our clothes, eat, use the toilet and exercise, all in that same small space. There was no privacy. For the first few months of my imprisonment, none of us were able to get fresh air, as one of my fellow inmates refused to go out.

I now know I was one of the lucky ones. Some of my colleagues were held in cells with triple bunkbeds with 23 other prisoners. I’ve heard of some prisoners living in inhumane conditions, in dank and humid cells that are rat and mice infested.

Now that I am free, I can’t stop thinking of all my friends and colleagues still languishing in prison. I sometimes think that knowing what they are going through is worse than being in prison myself. Their lives are being stolen, and for what?

It’s not possible to work as a journalist or activist in Belarus today. The authorities are arresting more people every day and the courts are handing down long prison sentences. It’s too dangerous.

The only way for journalists to work is to move abroad. The Belarusian people are hungry for news. Unfortunately, many use Russian aggregators and that is worrying. But there are still many subscribers to Telegram channels, and YouTube is still accessible, and journalists are constantly looking for new ways of communicating.

Despite everything, I remain optimistic that change will happen. The Lukashenka era cannot go on for ever. Belarusians abroad are working together as we never have before. Ours is a highly digitised society, and this digital age allows us to stay in touch. The regime does not understand the power of this overseas community. We will make change happen in Belarus.”

**This person’s name has been anonymised to protect their identity.*

Uladzislau works with a Belarusian online media that is now operating from abroad.

“I have not been back in Belarus for over a year. I know that if I was at home, I’d be in prison. Many of my colleagues and friends are in prison, even family members.

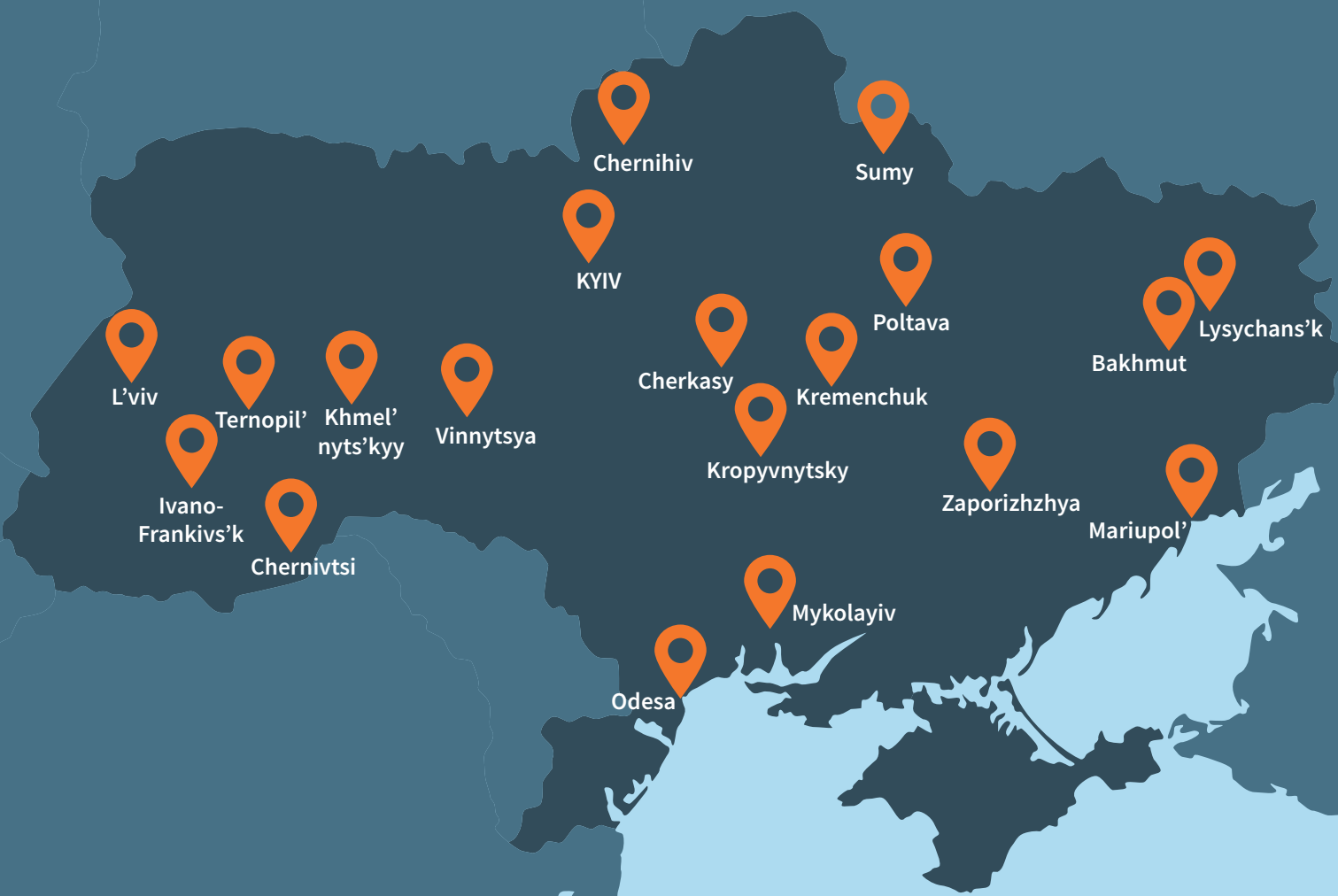
People in Belarus are scared. Some are too frightened to leave their homes to go out and buy bread. They know that at any time they could be stopped by the police and asked to show their phones. If the police find that they subscribe to any Telegram channels which the regime has declared ‘extremist’, they can be arrested on the spot.

Belarusians have lived a collective trauma over the past year. No one can forget how the authorities mistreated our people, or the photos of bullets and of people who were badly beaten.

Belarusians continue to access independent news on Telegram channels and on YouTube using VPNs. Young people show their parents and grandparents how to use VPNs. It’s like a national mission as we all want to make sure everyone can access reliable information. Probably about one-third of our readers now access our site using VPNs.”

**This person’s name has been anonymised to protect their identity.*





**EED PRESENT
IN 22 OF UKRAINE'S
25 REGIONS**

UKRAINE SPECIAL

Eight years after the Revolution of Dignity, the risks of democratic backsliding remain very real in Ukraine in the context of heightened security threats.

President Volodymyr Zelensky's administration has not lived up to popular expectations and there has been limited progress on reforms in Ukraine since he took office. The war in the east of the country continues, with the threat from Russia ever-present, and Russia-occupied Crimea saw a significant clampdown on Crimean Tatar activists during the year.

In a context of low trust in government, civil society plays a vital role in building and maintaining support for pro-democracy efforts. However, civic activists are working in an increasingly challenging environment. Many have been victims of intimidation and physical threats, with activists working on anti-corruption and environmental protection and regional activists particularly vulnerable. There appears to be a concerted attempt to split and divide civil society and to discredit it in the eyes of the general public, with many activists being sued in courts.

A key issue in recent years is the investigation of the 'Heavenly Hundred', or those who died during Euromaidan, and civil society is at the forefront of seeking justice for these individuals. While activists are focused on guarding the legacy of the revolution and pushing against the rollback of reforms, today their main focus is on strengthening resilience, engaging the general public, and attracting a new generation of activists. There is also increased pressure on independent media.

EED has a broad portfolio of grantees in Ukraine and is present in 22 of Ukraine's 25 regions. Its support focuses on pro-reform initiatives and civic activists working as initiators of positive societal change, particularly those working in the regions. EED supports grassroots activists, specifically those working on youth engagement and community-based activism in the regions, such as **Promolod**; civic education and local empowerment initiatives defending reforms; organisations that promote inclusivity and equal opportunities, such as **Projector**; organisations focused on accountability and transparency; and independent media, such as **Black Sea News**. EED has also provided a start-up grant for the establishment of **Kyiv Independent**, a new independent English-language media outlet created by journalists who were fired from the *Kyiv Post*.

This section also includes profiles of two EED alumni who have achieved great success since their initial grants several years ago.



PROFILE

Yevgenia Zakrevska: the lawyer of Maidan

While eight years have passed since more than one hundred people (the ‘Heavenly Hundred’) were killed during Euromaidan in Kyiv, leading proceedings against those responsible continue. Ukrainian lawyer **Yevgenia Zakrevska** and her team are determined to seek justice for these victims and their families. “I do not want to stop halfway. The perpetrators must be brought to justice,” she tells EED.

Her determination to establish the truth came into focus when she went on a hunger strike in November 2019 to protest against efforts to break up the team of Maidan crime investigators, which would have put ongoing inquiries at risk. Her protest was followed throughout Ukraine and internationally.

Zakrevska decided to provide legal aid to victims after seeing police officers during Euromaidan beating innocent people and pulling young girls to the ground. Previously a lawyer mostly focused on commercial casework, she has since become known as “the lawyer of Maidan”.

On 21 January, the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that breaches of human rights during Euromaidan in 2014 were systemic and carried out by state authorities to suppress peaceful protests. Among the cases reviewed by

the ECHR were the first victims of former president Viktor Yanukovich’s police brutality, whom Zakrevska represented. The decision provides vital support for the victims of Euromaidan, who now feel less alone.

EED’s support has allowed Zakrevska and her team to cover more cases and inform the wider Ukrainian society about their work. “More media are now following the trials, and growing public awareness makes these cases a higher priority for the courts,” she explains.

Another important activity supported by EED is advocating for legislative amendments that can ensure fair and effective investigation in Maidan cases – for example, the possibility of trial in absentia of perpetrators who fled the country.

Zakrevska believes that if justice is not established, it will be difficult to convince Ukrainian citizens to trust the country’s law enforcement and judicial system. She is determined to continue her quest for justice despite the obstacles.

“I do not count on finalising these Maidan cases thanks to a sudden ‘political will’. I only believe in systemic work, in victims who keep pushing to get sentences pronounced, and in the support of my colleagues and society,” she says.



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© Vilne Radio

***Vilne Radio*: a unique independent voice on local news in eastern Ukraine**

Anastasia Shybiko is one of the founders of *Vilne Radio* or 'Free Radio', a small independent radio station operating from Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, 25 kilometres from the front line. The bilingual radio station was founded by Shybiko Dmitry Kozyarsky and Ilya Lysenko, both well-known volunteers familiar with the region, as an independent media focused on regional news in the temporarily occupied territories and frontline communities.

Since its establishment, *Vilne Radio* has become an importance source of news in Donbas, with major national and international media frequently consulting it for their own newsfeeds. The media also covers social topics relevant to the local population, businesses and youth, broadcasting on FM, online and running a popular online media outlet. The team has been an important source of

information on the Covid-19 pandemic, and it has provided 24/7 coverage during crisis periods. Today, *Vilne Radio's* reporting is more important than ever given the heightened security situation in the region.

"We are still manging to reach out to people, and our FM signal is stable, although we know it could be blocked at any time. There is so much conflicting information, and people are confused. We try to analyse all the information, fact check it, and present the most important news pieces. We are still trying to include our social programming, as well as programmes with psychological support, but obviously everyone's focus today is on the security situation," says Shybiko.



Projector and Vitaliy Matveyev: A lawyer of the vulnerable

As a law student and then a commercial banking lawyer, Vitaliy Matveyev volunteered for several organisations helping marginalised groups. In 2018, he decided to focus professionally on this work, founding the NGO **Projector** to provide legal and psychological assistance to vulnerable people facing discrimination in Odesa, southern Ukraine.

Projector also conducts communications campaigns against the discrimination of LGBTQI+ people, HIV-positive people, and victims of domestic violence. Today, the organisation's reputation extends well beyond Odesa, and the Projector team can barely meet the growing demand for their services.

Matveyev became well-known in Ukraine after winning a two-year legal battle to abolish a law banning HIV-positive people from adopting children.

He believes that attitudes are slowly changing in Ukraine when it comes to marginalised groups. "Ukrainians, especially young people, are showing more tolerance and understanding. It is the proper application of principles of the rule of law and our attachment to European values that are enabling this fundamental change in the public mindset," he says.

JurFem: Improving gender equality in the legal sector

In 2017, a group of young Ukrainian women lawyers conducted an anonymous online survey among female colleagues. They were shocked by the results: 46.5 percent of respondents reported discrimination when entering the legal profession and 36.9 percent reported sexual harassment at work.

The women were quick to act, establishing **JurFem, the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association**, with a mission to change attitudes towards women within the legal profession and contribute to relevant legislation.

“Every day, we work to change perceptions of gender equality, violations of women’s rights and prevailing discriminatory practices against women,” explains JurFem chair Hrystyna Kit.

To date, they have had some notable successes. JurFem’s lawyers prepare legal opinions on almost every piece of legislation discussed by the Ukrainian parliament, focusing on gender aspects, and thanks to their work, the law on domestic violence has been updated. With EED’s support, JurFem is now developing its institutional capacity and offering summer schools for female law students on gender equality and women’s rights, topics not normally part of university curricula.



Promolod: Building a new community life in Cherkasy

Ivan and Daryna Podolian, a young couple from Cherkasy, in central Ukraine, are breathing new life into their city with their NGO, **Promolod**.

As was the case for many others, the 2014 Revolution of Dignity encouraged the Podolians to engage in civic activism. “For me, the key question was: what would this ‘new Ukraine’ offer the young men and women when they return home from the war?” says Ivan. The couple began by organising speaking clubs, English classes, and festivals, and then created an incubator for civic projects, which became Promolod.

Promolod hosts several incubator events each year, both for civic projects and for businesses, regularly keeping in touch with alumni, who themselves often become donors and sponsors of other civic projects kickstarted by Promolod. They believe that these two interconnected networks of civic activists and business people help strengthen community ties and make civic projects self-sustainable, as everyone is working towards the common goal of improving life in Cherkasy.





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EED SUCCESS STORY – ALUMNUS



Crimean Tatar Resource Center – keeping Crimea in the international limelight

The **Crimean Tatar Resource Center (CTRC)** was set up in 2015 by a group of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had fled occupied Crimea to mainland Ukraine. EED institutional funding helped the CTRC establish itself as an NGO.

From the outset, the CTRC joined efforts to oppose the Russian occupation and assist IDPs and Crimeans who had stayed in the occupied territory, by helping Crimean Tatars defend their civic, political, and cultural rights and by improving their awareness and understanding of human rights protection mechanisms. The centre also functioned as a hub for Crimean Tatars forced to flee Crimea, as well as for those who remained there. It ensured advocacy work in Kyiv was aimed at shaping Ukraine's policies on Crimea and the Crimean Tatars in particular.

Today, the CTRC is a major NGO that conducts and facilitates a range of activities aimed at non-violent de-occupation,

reintegration, and the sustainable development of Crimea, including legal initiatives on ensuring the collective rights of Indigenous People in their historical homeland. It also publishes statistics on political prisoners in Crimea; to date, there are 234 political prisoners, 165 of whom are representatives of the Crimean Tatar people.

The CTRC has played a key role in ensuring that the issue of the temporarily occupied Crimea remains high on the international agenda. It made major contributions to Ukraine's countering of Russian aggression through the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN's International Court of Justice and in 2021 was instrumental in launching the Crimean Platform, an international consultation and co-ordination forum aimed at improving the effectiveness of the global response to the ongoing occupation.



Black Sea News: Reporting the news from and about Crimea

Andriy Klimenko was one of the first analysts to ring alarm bells about a possible Russian military operation in Crimea in September 2013. When Russia illegally annexed the peninsula less than six months later, Klimenko and his associates decided to start reporting on these events in Yalta. *Black Sea News (BSN)* was born, quickly gaining worldwide recognition as a reputable source of news from Crimea.

When Klimenko and his team were forced to flee Crimea to evade arrest, leaving behind their business, apartments, and personal effects, they resumed *BSN's* work in Kyiv,

monitoring breaches of international law, human rights, and Western sanctions in Crimea.

Klimenko's name is now on a list of official 'terrorists and extremists of the Russian Federation', a measure that he considers, "a recognition by the Russian authorities that we are doing things right".

Western partners and international organisations often invite the *BSN* team to give briefings on Crimea, and its information is used as a basis for imposing additional sanctions against Russia.



EED SUCCESS STORY – ALUMNUS



The Fourth Estate – an independent regional outlet succeeding despite the odds

Today, the *Fourth Estate*, an independent online media outlet in Rivne, a city in western Ukraine, is hugely popular with locals, who appreciate its quality, independent news and its investigative reports. But, in the spring of 2018, the outlet faced a highly challenging situation, with a series of physical attacks on its staff as part of a wider campaign in the region against anti-corruption journalists.

The *Fourth Estate* team had revealed several corruption cases, including in the city council, putting pressure on the authorities. Then its office was burnt down and its internet servers were stolen. EED provided the *Fourth Estate* with desperately needed emergency support to help it recover from this challenging situation.

This grant not only helped the outlet survive and re-establish itself in the mediasphere, it also helped ensure future financial sustainability, as the team received coaching on working with international donors. In 2018, the outlet was awarded the country's 'High Standards of Journalism' award and recognised as one of the top three regional media outlets in Ukraine.

Today, the *Fourth Estate* is a thriving independent media outlet with an annual budget double that of 2018. It is instrumental in ensuring accountability of local government, has a wide readership in the region, and can be accessed via its website and a variety of social media channels.

TUNISIA SPECIAL

The events of 25 July surprised many international observers. Amid a political, social, and health crisis, President Kais Saied invoked Article 80 of the Constitution, lifting parliamentary immunity, suspending parliament, and dismissing the prime minister. This decision followed growing discontent and nationwide protests and was greeted with jubilation by huge crowds, while many others denounced the action as a *coup d'état* amid fears of democratic backsliding.

Tunisia has long been depicted as the democratic success of the Arab world and the cradle of protest movements. The self-immolation of 26-year-old Tunisian fruit-seller Mohamed Bouazizi triggered revolutions across the Middle East and North Africa and led to the toppling of Tunisia's dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The revolution brought about political pluralism and more personal freedoms, and the country has endured assassination attempts and terrorist attacks. A new constitution was adopted in 2014 and a flourishing civil society developed.

However, Tunisia has been shaken by political instability in recent years. The most recent parliament was particularly weak, with ineffectual debates and little consensus. This prevented the adoption of reforms and measures that could address the country's challenges, including a major economic crisis amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been particularly deadly in Tunisia.

President Saied extended the extraordinary powers in late August. The nomination of a government on 22 September has only been partially reassuring, as the president officially dissolved parliament, granted himself control of all executive and legislative functions, and undermined the 2014 Constitution by replacing it with a three-page decree. Polarisation has gained ground, and official discourse is rife with populism. The tendency to repress dissent, already observed in the past few years, is also on the rise, a possible sign of the resurgence of authoritarian practices.

EED has remained in touch with its partners in Tunisian civil society throughout this crisis. Many have struggled to find a place for themselves within this new reality and fear for the democratic future of their country.

Observatoire Raqabah: investigating corruption and creating a culture of accountability

Imed Daimi, the founder and president of **Observatoire Raqabah**, was a political refugee for 20 years before he returned to his native Tunisia in 2011.

On his return, he worked as part of the Constituent Assembly, which wrote the 2014 Constitution, and was a member of parliament from 2015 to 2019, where he served as rapporteur on the commission of civil liberties and human rights and worked in the field of anti-corruption. This experience led him to found Observatoire Raqabah ('Supervision') as an organisation focused on the accountability and transparency of state enterprises and public institutions.

Observatoire Raqabah has three main areas of activity. It investigates corruption cases within state structures and public enterprises, reporting these to relevant authorities and naming and shaming guilty parties, publishing short videos to bring these to the attention of the public. It also studies legislation and corruption cases and proposes anti-corruption reforms. And it is working to build a culture of accountability in Tunisia, where citizens can act as watchdogs for the government. As part of this mission, it works with young people explaining corruption and why it is vital to push against it.

EED provided the organisation with core funding to enable it to develop its internal structure and fund core activities.

Daimi is worried about recent events in Tunisia. "We face huge challenges and we need to protect our democratic processes. We have made great strides over the past ten years, but there are huge weaknesses. The parliament must begin to function again. We cannot deny an institution within a democracy just because it's not working. We need to change the way we go about business and develop new rules. We need to recognise the errors of the past and review the legislative agenda," he says.

He notes that Raqabah is more focused than ever on corruption, which he sees as the biggest challenge faced in the country. "We need to build bridges with the general population over the next few months. People feel cut off and forgotten by a political elite that they see as just defending its own interests. We need to rework our democratic culture," says Daimi.



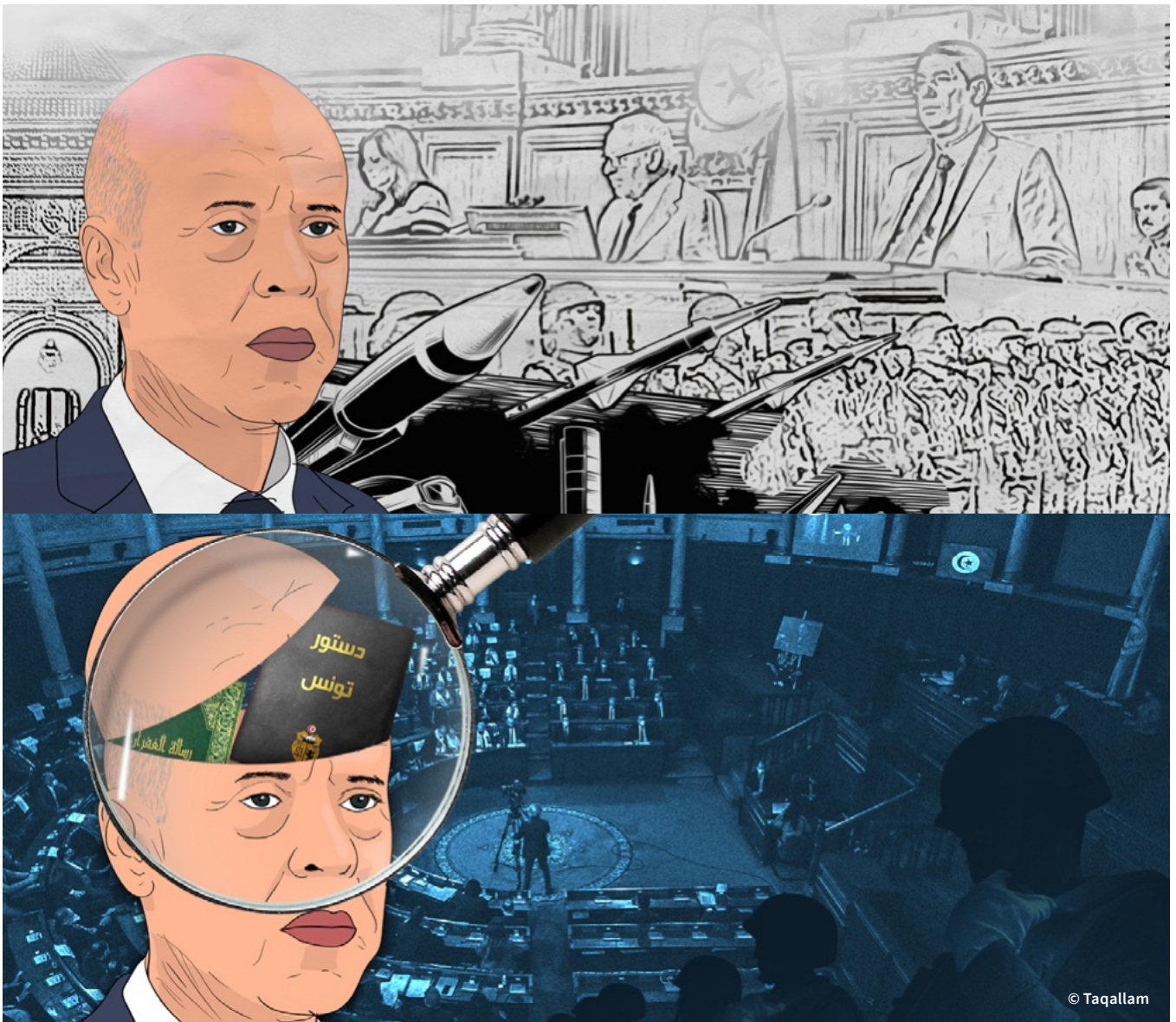
Innsane: a media platform focused on human rights

Launched in May 2020 by a group of young Tunisian media actors, *Innsane* ('Human') is a media platform that focuses on slow investigative journalism and addresses human rights issues. It includes investigations by freelance journalists and individuals who are also victims of human rights violations, all of whom have been trained in mobile journalism by *Innsane*. These are broadcast as podcasts and videos over its platform.

Led by journalist Amal Mekki, *Innsane* focuses on youth audiences, publishing stories in the local Tunisian dialect and posting on popular platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

Innsane has several paid partnerships for the production of visual content for third parties, as well as videos and reportages on agreed topics and training contracts. An EED grant provides core funding to enable the employment of a full-time team.

Commenting on the current crisis, Mekki says, "Our role is more important than ever. We have to report on events and be vigilant that human rights are protected. It is our responsibility to make sure we don't lose democratic momentum."



© Taqallam

Taqallam: Online investigative magazine *Al Qatiba* a hit in Tunisia and neighbouring countries

This September, the media association **Taqallam** marked one year of its online magazine *Al Qatiba* ('The Battalion') by organising a seminar on media reform in Tunisia. "We wanted to make people reflect and to think of solutions. We felt that was much more appropriate than wasting money on a party," says Wael Mejri, founder and chief editor.

Mejri, a veteran journalist who has worked for all leading independent Tunisian media, founded Taqallam as a media project that could bring together Tunisians. He and his colleagues considered various options before starting *Al Qatiba*, a magazine focusing on investigative reporting, with a regional remit.

Launched thanks to EED seed funding amid a strict lockdown in Tunisia, *Al Qatiba* is now one of the country's leading online media, if not the number one. Some of its videos have been watched more than a million times, and it uses audio, video, and photos to make content attractive and easy to understand.

Over the past year, *Al Qatiba* has carried out a record 30 investigative reports, including a report on a Tunisian oil company suspected of corruption that was subsequently discussed in parliament, and another on children's sexual exploitation in Morocco that was awarded the Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press.

Al Qatiba is admired by readers for its independent stance and is widely read at home and in neighbouring countries. The team has just launched a new print edition of the magazine. Over the coming months, it plans to launch English, French, and Tunisian dialect editions in addition to the current Arabic-language version.

Mejri considers that in a mediasphere dominated by political and business interests, *Al Qatiba* can play a key role in the current crisis. "Tunisians are looking for new voices. We show all sides of this crisis. It is our economic independence that allows us to do this," he says.

KU DIGJËT
KATA
RIHËT



PARK KOMBËTAR, JO PARK TREGTAR

RESULTS AND LEARNING

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning is a continuum of monitoring the implementation of grants, evaluating these during and after implementation, and reflecting on and learning from the results.

The EED Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system has been designed to support EED's gap-filling, flexible, unbureaucratic, and demand-driven support model. EED follows an adaptive approach to democracy assistance, which allows for experimentation, learning-by-doing, and the flexibility to adapt to changes in environments and evolving insights.

EED's MEL approach is designed to minimise the burden on grantees regarding data collection and reporting requirements. As in all of EED's work, an emphasis is placed on avoiding harm, and the operational and political risks of EED's assistance are carefully assessed and monitored to mitigate risks.

Independent evaluation of EED

EED's Statutes require it to undertake an external evaluation of the Endowment and its activities at least every five years.

In July 2021, the EED Board of Governors formally approved the final draft of the 2020 Independent Evaluation of EED.

Key findings of the evaluation are:

- » **Relevance:** EED is doing the right things in line with its mandate, responds to the needs of activists, fosters not imposes democracy, has a strong focus on building human connections that enables it to find capable new actors, has very good knowledge of country contexts, faces challenges in countries where gaps are really wide (can't 'fill' the gap).
- » **Effectiveness and impact:** EED funding has contributed to new and more effective pro-democracy actors and activism, as well as more inclusive civil and political processes; risk-taking mandate was a key factor that contributed to these positive results.
- » **Efficiency:** Grant-making processes and procedures work well. However, the model is highly labour-intensive, given the lean set-up of EED, and this results in a high workload.



HUMAN RESOURCES AND BUDGET

EED's **47 core staff** members have worked and lived extensively in the countries where EED operates. They are nationals of 27 countries, including Albania, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Jordan, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

EED runs a successful traineeship programme. In 2021, 11 trainees supported the work of the operations and programme teams. Many former trainees continue to work in democracy support and are now employed by organisations including the European Institute for Peace, Open Society Foundation, Prague Civil Society Centre, Democracy Reporting

International, Centre for European Policy Studies, Solidar, and the European Commission, while others have obtained scholarships to continue their studies at the College of Europe in Bruges and Natolin.

Twenty-five European countries that are members of the Board of Governors have contributed to EED's programme budget, as well as **Canada** through special grants for Ukraine and Belarus. In 2021, EED also received contributions from Iceland and the Robert Bosch Stiftung. EED's operations budget is covered by a European Commission grant.



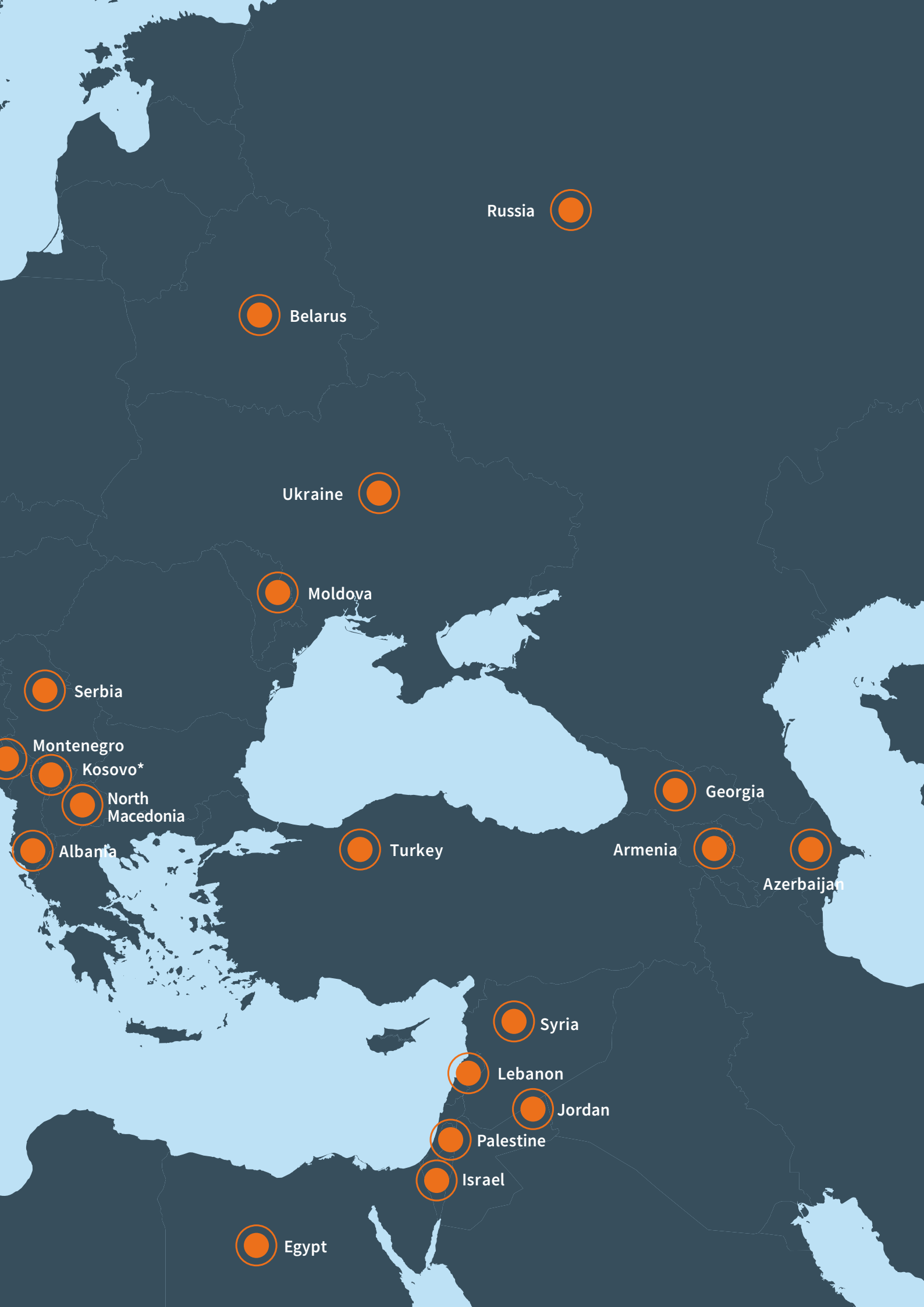
Morocco

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Tunisia

Libya

Bosnia and Herzegovina



Russia

Belarus

Ukraine

Moldova

Serbia

Montenegro

Kosovo*

North Macedonia

Albania

Turkey

Georgia

Armenia

Azerbaijan

Syria

Lebanon

Jordan

Palestine

Israel

Egypt

FUNDING PARTNERS

To date, 25 European countries that are members of the Board of Governors and the European Commission have contributed to the EED budget.



Austria



Belgium



Bulgaria



Croatia



Cyprus



Czech Republic



Denmark



Estonia



Finland



France



Germany



Hungary



Ireland



Latvia



Lithuania



Luxembourg



The Netherlands



Norway



Poland



Romania



Slovakia



Slovenia



Spain



Sweden



UK



European
Commission

Canada^{ca} also contributes through special grants for Ukraine and Belarus.

In 2021, Iceland and the Robert Bosch Stiftung also contributed to EED grants.

Endnotes

- 1 Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, 'Freedom in the World 2021: Democracy Under Siege', Freedom House, 2021, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege> (Freedom House, 2021).
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