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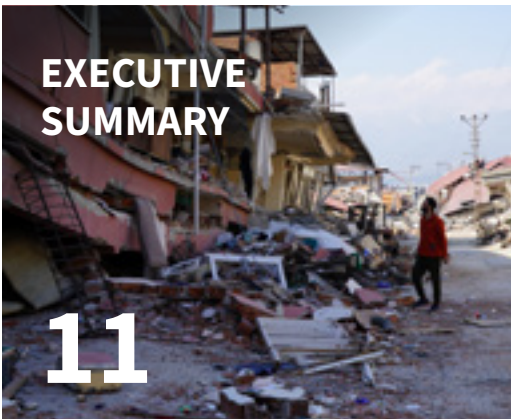
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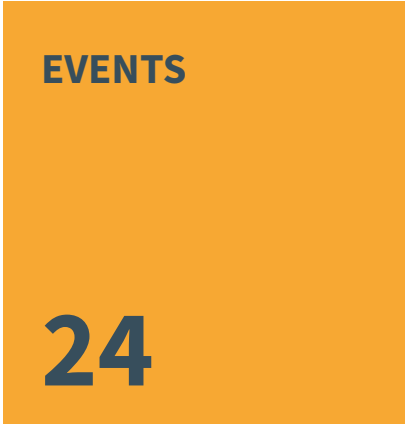






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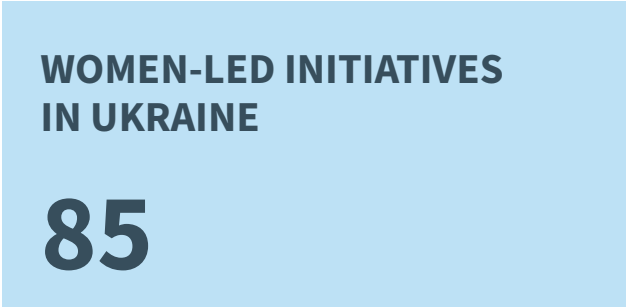
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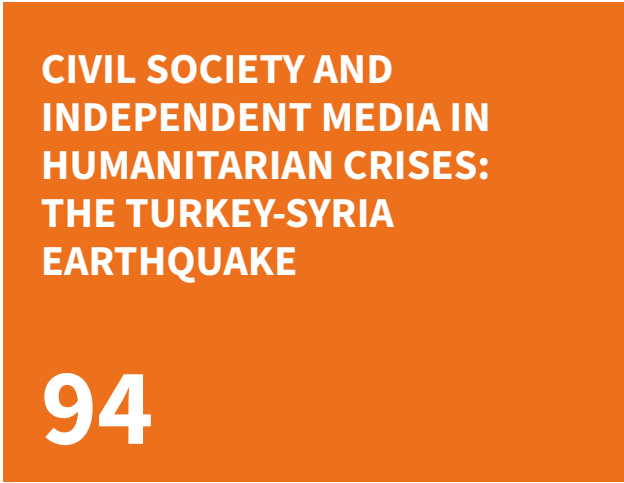
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# FOREWORD

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**BY DAVID MCALLISTER MEP  
CHAIR OF EED BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Over the past ten years, EED has been at the forefront of European efforts to support democratic values within the European Neighbourhood and beyond, with EED's initial geographic mandate of the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods extending to Eurasia, the Western Balkans, and Turkey. Democratic efforts have faced many challenges over this period. However, 2023 was an exceptionally difficult year with catastrophic natural disasters and military conflicts affecting people's lives and the work of EED's partners.

In February, EED's partners were part of the relief effort following the devastating earthquake in southern Turkey and northwest Syria. In September, two further natural disasters, the earthquake in west Morocco and the dam collapses in Derna, Libya, saw thousands killed and made homeless. Poor coordination of the relief effort by governments meant that civil society had to step in to assist the affected populations.

The all-out war between military factions that erupted in Sudan in April has killed thousands and displaced millions from their homes. Hamas' terrorist attack on southern Israel in October saw hundreds of civilians killed and kidnapped. The ensuing Israeli air and ground military attacks have killed tens of thousands of civilians in Gaza, particularly women and children, in an escalation of the Middle East conflict affecting the overall region and global geopolitics.

Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine has continued for a second year with a terrible loss of life and tens of thousands of life-changing injuries. During this year, the EU has pledged its continued support to Ukraine, the reconstruction of society, and its European integration. At this time of war, EED's partners in Ukraine from civil society and in independent media continue to contribute to societal resilience, defend democratic values, and demand reforms and accountability from their leaders.

In September, EED's partners in Armenia contributed to the relief effort when almost the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh was forced to flee the enclave over a matter of days following a military assault by Azerbaijan. Specific support was provided to journalists.

In the Western Balkans and Turkey, there have been concerning developments in many contexts. The criminalisation of defamation and the foreign agent law in Republika Srpska, one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are emblematic of ongoing stifling of democratic voices faced in the country. EED's partners have actively engaged in public debates on new legislation and are dedicated to promoting freedom of expression. During the


electoral and post-electoral period in Turkey, there was a rise in attacks against LGBT+ individuals, prompting EED's partners to advocate against proposed reactionary amendments to the constitution. Likewise, in Serbia, EED's partners uncovered significant irregularities during the recent December elections, sparking international concerns about the democratic process.

In these challenging times, it is crucial to remember EED's mission and purpose. EED is not focused on conflict resolution or disaster relief. Instead, it stands behind individuals who uphold democratic principles, respect human rights, and advocate for non-violence. EED supports those who persist in promoting democratic values, even in challenging environments like Russia, Belarus, Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Syria, and beyond.

We strongly believe that by fostering the democratic aspirations of our neighbours, we also contribute to the security of our continent. Since its establishment in 2013, EED has supported thousands of organisations and individuals who understand that the future and peace of their countries hinge on the fundamental principles of democracy. They are resolute in their commitment to fostering more democratic societies.

There was some good news this year. The adoption of the 2023 EU Enlargement Package in October was a significant milestone and a source of encouragement for all people advocating for Ukraine, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia's future in the EU. EED's role is more crucial than ever in this enlargement context. EED supports a diverse range of civil society and independent media partners who are tackling issues that will ultimately determine the success of the enlargement negotiations. These issues include promoting democratic values, advocating for reform, ensuring freedom of expression, combating corruption, and striving to establish cultures of accountability and transparency within public bodies and government.

The European Parliament has played a central role in EED's governance since its establishment, with Members serving on EED's Board of Governors. Since 2019 I have the honour of serving as Chair of the EED Board of Governors. I look forward to continuing to serve in this role and to support EED in its next phase of development.



**David McAllister**

Chair of EED's Board of Governors

Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the European Parliament

# INTRODUCTION

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**BY JERZY POMIANOWSKI**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EUROPEAN ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY**

EED was set up during the period that followed the Arab Spring and rising tensions in Eastern Europe. Ten years on, much has changed in our world. While 2013 was a time of muted optimism, today, as democracy is in crisis globally and the world has become increasingly authoritarian, there seems less room for optimism. However, the past ten years have also seen the emergence of important democracy movements, including within the European Neighbourhood, the region of EED's work.

Ten years ago I had the honour of setting up the Endowment Secretariat as its Founding Executive Director. I believed that EED had an important role to play in bringing a human-centered approach to democracy support, that was driven by local needs, based on deep contextual knowledge, and the ability to take significant operational and political risks. Today, as I reflect on EED's achievements and those of our partners over this past decade, I am proud of what has been accomplished. Over ten years, EED has provided over 2,500 grants to our partners for a total of €200 million. As my conversations with our partners and evidence from the ground confirm, EED's support has made and is continuing to make an important difference to civil society and independent media within the societies we support.

In June, a "*Strategic Orientation Document of the Board of Governors for the Further Development of the European Endowment for Democracy*" was adopted by the EED Board of Governors. This document sets out strategic choices and priorities for the next period. The approval of this document marks the start of EED's next ambitious phase of development.

In July, we had the great honour of marking EED's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the Egmont Palace in Brussels. We were particularly proud to be joined at this event by Hadja Lahbib, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs; Maia Sandu, President of the Republic of Moldova who joined us by live video link; Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights; Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Head of the United Transitional

Cabinet of Belarus; and Oleksandra Matviichuk, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and director of EED's partner, the Center for Civil Liberties from Ukraine. We were also delighted to have received video messages from the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola and to be joined by partners from Ukraine, Lebanon, North Macedonia, among many others.

In September, in the framework of the International Democracy Day, EED organised a two-day Democracy Support Summit in Brussels, which included a Transatlantic Dialogue with members of our community of practise to discuss global challenges and areas for collaboration.

As usual, this Annual Report provides a review of EED's work over the past year. During this year, EED received 1,326 applications for support, 381 of which were funded.

In this report, we aim to tell the stories behind these figures and to profile some of the many democracy activists and independent media who have been supported this year, who work day-in day-out to bring about more democratic futures in their societies. Many of EED's partners operate in exceptionally difficult circumstances, as natural disasters and military conflicts have afflicted many regions of the European Neighbourhood, and political environments have become increasingly hostile and repressive.

Despite the challenges of global instability and the very real threats to democracy, ten years on, I remain convinced of the relevance and importance of EED's mandate. EED's support is an act of democratic solidarity that focuses on people's needs, their aspirations and their resilience, and their role as the drivers of change. Over the next period, EED will continue to support our partners to protect and build their democratic futures, and to accompany them as they take everyday risks to carry out this work.



**Jerzy Pomianowski**  
Executive Director  
European Endowment for Democracy

# EED APPROACH

## INNOVATIVE

EED is open to new and innovative ideas and responds in a dynamic way to requests for funding 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 frequently is a lifeline to organisations struggling to continue with their work in times of turmoil or when facing severe repression.



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## DEMAND-DRIVEN AND FLEXIBLE

EED adapts 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.



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## SUPPORTING THE UNSUPPORTED

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



# 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 2,500 grants and has evolved into a vibrant, innovative and respected member of the democracy support community.

EED funds a vast array of both registered and unregistered pro-democracy actors including human rights and political activists, pro-democratic movements, civil society organisations (CSOs), emerging leaders, independent media and journalists that may not be able to obtain funding otherwise. Support is contingent on adherence to democratic values, respect for international human rights and observance of principles of non-violence by the grantees.

## OUR MISSION

EED's goal is 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 a principle of fostering democracy and facilitating initiatives of local actors. EED specialises in cases where the space for civil society is shrinking due to administrative, legal, social and political barriers and accepts significant political and operational risks as part of its operations.

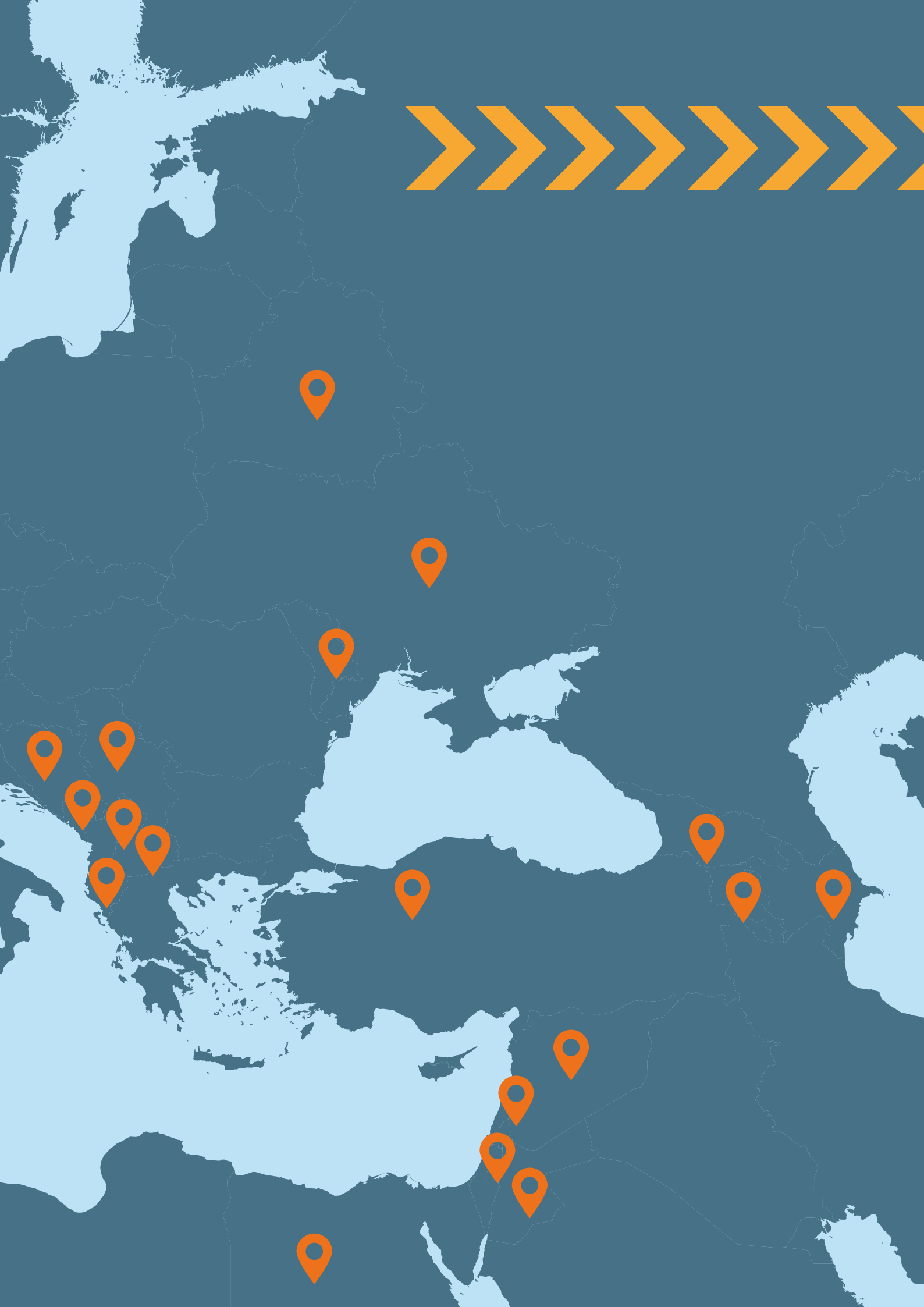
## OUR VISION

- We believe in taking an unconventional approach to supporting democracy
- We focus our tailor-made, flexible and timely grants on democracy activists who can't 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, as well as Eurasia, and aims to ensure, as far as possible, a geographical balance of engagement and funding. Some grants are provided for relevant applications from countries in the area adjacent to the neighbourhood depending on needs, available funds, and political priorities.









# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Annual Report provides an overview of the work of the European Endowment for Democracy in the European Neighbourhood and beyond in 2023. The report tells the stories of civil society activists, organisations and independent media EED has supported over this past year and of others supported over the past decade.

EED's slogan since its launch in 2013 has been to "support the unsupported." EED supports those who believe in democratic futures for their countries and societies. It provides support that is demand-driven and flexible, and that constantly adapts to local and political realities. EED's story over the past decade is the story of its partners, who are at the centre of this year's annual report.

In this special anniversary annual report, we have included the profiles of ten of EED's partners, who are the faces of this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and who together represent the breadth and depth of EED's grant-making across the countries and regions where it works.

## **A DECADE OF SUPPORT TO PRO-DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM**

This year's report includes an article by Hardy Merriman, from the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, which reviews the past decade of pro-democracy activism and movements across the region of EED's mandate. His research has found that civil society movements are one of the most powerful drivers of democratic change.

## **EED'S STRATEGIC ORIENTATION DOCUMENT**

Included inside is a summary of the "EED Strategic Direction 2013-2023" document by Jerzy Pomianowski, EED's Executive Director, which sets out EED's strategic choices and priorities for the next decade. This document was developed by the EED Board of Governors and its Chair, David McAllister MEP.

## **ONE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY, MANY CONTEXTS**

2023 was a year marked by war and natural catastrophe on a massive scale, as has not been experienced in recent decades. Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine continued into its second year, with at least 10,000 civilians killed and nearly 19,000 injured since February 2022 (in unoccupied areas of Ukraine), and 10 million people fleeing their homes, including 6.4 million who have sought refuge outside Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> In February, tens of thousands of people were killed by a massive earthquake in Syria and Turkey. In September, thousands were killed in an earthquake in the west of Morocco. A week later, at least 20,000 people were killed when dams collapsed in Derna in Libya and a quarter of the city was destroyed. Following the September military assault by Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh, 100,000 Armenians fled the enclave.

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1 UN News (2023) Ukraine: Lasting toll of war 'beyond measure', Security Council hears, 6 December 2023, accessed at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144452>

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalated dramatically during the year, with the 7 October Hamas-led terrorist attack on south Israel. Israel's subsequent air and ground offensive on the Gaza Strip killed more than 20,000 Palestinians by the end of December 2023, the majority of these women and children. Approximately 85 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.23 million are estimated to be internally displaced.

Military conflicts also rumble on in other regions of EED's operations, including Syria, Libya, Sudan, the Sahel and Yemen. Even in the more peaceful regions, democracy is under increasing threat, with creeping authoritarianism evident in many contexts.

Yet EED's work with thousands of partners over the past years demonstrates that popular demand for democracy remains strong, as people seek to live in more open societies where they can have a greater say in their local government and improve their lives. Ten years on from its establishment, EED's flexible operating model remains highly relevant, enabling EED to support democracy partners in open and more closed environments, as well as in conflict environments, where many other donors struggle to operate.

**AREAS OF SUPPORT**

Initiatives supported by EED can be broadly categorised into 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; arts and culture; and youth.

The central part of this report is structured around these thematic areas and contains the stories of a selection of EED's partners who are working to build and support democracy in their countries and regions. These include, among others, a minority media in Serbia; a youth group refurbishing buildings and organising cultural activities breathing new life into Nazareth's Old Town; an LGBT+ student organisation in Turkey; and a group building a culture of activism among youth in a small town in eastern Georgia.

A few anonymous profiles of partners working in more dangerous contexts are included in the report, with their names changed to protect their identities.

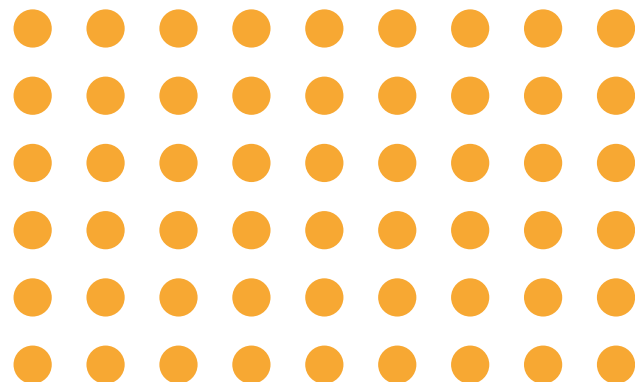
**ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

Environmental challenges are particularly pressing in the Western Balkans, a region with some of the highest levels of pollution in Europe. A sub-section of this report features the stories of EED partners in the Western Balkans who are mobilising local citizens to fight against pollution and other environmental damage, giving rural communities an opportunity to play an active role in decision-making processes.

**UKRAINIAN WOMEN LEADERS DURING RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION**

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, millions of women have mobilised across the country, joining volunteer movements to provide humanitarian relief, document the brutalities of war, or enlist in the Ukrainian defence forces. Women leaders, including many EED partners, are at the helm of civil society organisations and independent media outlets and are helping to drive Ukraine's reform agenda, strengthen anti-corruption measures, and push for transparency and accountability in political processes.

Approximately 57 percent of grants awarded by EED in 2023 in Ukraine went to organisations led by women. This section of this report highlights their work and the central role they are determined to play in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction.





**CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES: THE TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE**

A special section of this Annual Report is dedicated to the work of EED’s partners in the aftermath of natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. EED emergency response grants provided funding to partners following the earthquake in eastern Turkey and northern Syria in February.

**MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING**

During the year, detailed Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) guidelines were approved to further improve institutional learning. EED co-organised a two-day MEL convening to share experiences and foster learning among democracy and human rights grant-making organisations. EED also completed a review of the Centre for Ukrainian Activists (CUA), established shortly after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, that noted the high relevance of the Centre’s “Work and Rest Programme”. An internal review of EED’s support in Egypt is currently ongoing.

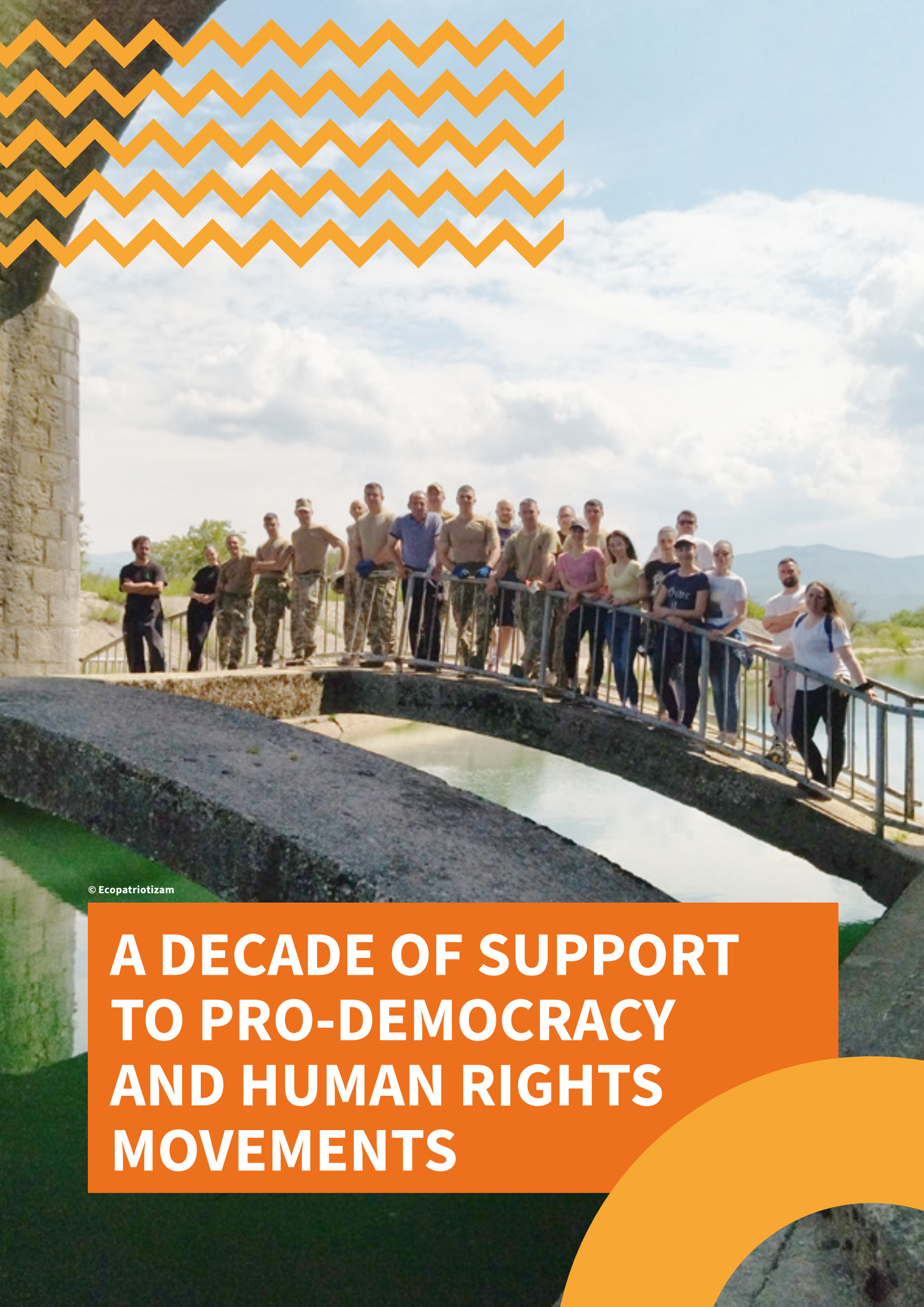
**GOVERNANCE, HUMAN RESOURCES AND BUDGET**

The EED Secretariat is composed of 61 staff members from 27 different countries. Throughout 2023, our traineeship programme gave an additional 18 trainees the opportunity to gain work experience in democracy support.

Twenty-five European countries, which are members of the Board of Governors, have contributed to EED’s programme budget to date, as has Canada through a special grant for Ukraine and Belarus. In 2023, EED also received contributions from Iceland. The EED Secretariat core operating cost is covered by a European Commission grant.



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# A DECADE OF SUPPORT TO PRO-DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

# Trends and lessons learned

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**BY HARDY MERRIMAN**  
**INTERNATIONAL CENTER ON NONVIOLENT CONFLICT**

The 2013 launch of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) came at a time of anxious debate about the state of democracy worldwide. Indicators showed moderate democratic recession starting approximately five to seven years prior to this date, but it was not clear how sustained or sharp the trend would become.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting this ambivalence, the 2013 Democracy Index report was titled *Democracy in Limbo*. Deliberation about the significance of the recession continued in ensuing years—in 2015, the *Journal of Democracy* dedicated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue to the question “Is Democracy in Decline?”, with one of the journal’s editors commenting that “this seemed to be the question that everyone was asking as 2015 approached.”<sup>3</sup>

Roughly a decade later, the debate has changed. After a slow start, the current autocratic wave has accelerated rapidly, with alarming evidence that democracy is in crisis globally. Conversations now centre on what the global democratic community—states, multilaterals, civil society organisations, diaspora populations, and others—should do to respond.

EED is well-positioned to play a leading role in such crucial efforts. Its mandate to “support those who believe in democratic futures for their countries and societies” and to provide assistance that is “demand-driven and flexible, and that constantly adapts to local and political realities” aligns with insights gleaned over the last decade about the central role of mobilised populations and movements in reversing the autocratic tide.

A growing body of research finds that bottom-up pressure from popular civil resistance movements—using tactics like strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, acts of non-cooperation and other nonviolent tactics—are historically one of the most powerful drivers of democratic gains globally.<sup>4</sup> This was true during the third democratic wave (1974-2006) as

well over the previous century.<sup>5</sup> Quantitative research also reveals that movements seeking accountability, human rights, democratic change, or democratic preservation are increasing significantly worldwide.<sup>6</sup> The European Neighbourhood and beyond saw its share of such movements over the last decade, including in Turkey (2013), Ukraine (2014), Lebanon (2015, 2019), North Macedonia (2016), Slovakia (2017), Armenia (2018), Algeria (2019), Sudan (2019), Iraq (2019), Belarus (2020), Iran (2022), and Georgia (2023).

This rise in movements is not surprising. Autocrats and polarising demagogues hollow out state institutions and repress independent civil society organisations, causing ordinary people to conclude that relying on elections and the legal system is inadequate. Instead, people organise in their communities, foster self-reliance, and mobilise to create social, economic, and political pressure on institutions to live up to their public mandates. As long as institutional channels remain corrupted or broken, we should expect more movements challenging unaccountable leaders and governments.

Entrenched and aspiring autocrats understand this fact and rightly perceive these movements as a threat to their rule. In response, they increasingly coordinate with and support each other. Authoritarians share strategies to clamp down on civil society, infuse surveillance technology into their repressive apparatuses, spread misinformation, offer mutual assistance when they are challenged, and provide cover for each other in multilateral institutions. Built incrementally, these capacities appeared to grow slowly, but their gains have compounded for nearly 20 years and strengthened autocratic resilience. This is evidenced by the fact that civil resistance movements seeking political transitions succeeded 58 percent of the time between 2000 and 2009, but only 34 percent of the time between 2010 and 2019.<sup>7</sup>

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2 The Economist Intelligence Unit (2013) *Democracy Index 2013: Democracy in Limbo*; Freedom House (2014) *Freedom in the World 2014: The Democratic Leadership Gap*.

3 Plattner, M. F. (2015) “Is Democracy in Decline?” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 26, no. 1, p. 5.

4 Chenoweth, E. (2020) “The Future of Nonviolent Resistance,” *Journal of Democracy*, July, vol. 31, no. 3; Pinckney, J. (2020) *From Dissent to Democracy: The Promise and Perils of Civil Resistance Transitions*, Oxford University Press.

5 Karatnycky, A. & Ackerman, P. (2005) *How Freedom is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy*, Freedom House.

6 Chenoweth, E. (2020) “The Future of Nonviolent Resistance,” *Journal of Democracy*, July, vol. 31, no. 3; Ortiz, I., Burke, S., Berrada, M. & Saenz Cortés, H. (2022) *World Protests: A Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Palgrave Macmillan.

7 Chenoweth, E. (2020) “The Future of Nonviolent Resistance,” *Journal of Democracy*, July, vol. 31, no. 3.



## IMPROVING PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT SUPPORT

To foster a fourth democratic wave, this trend must be reversed, and the impetus for how this can happen is clear. Democracy's proponents are found in every country in the world—in populations who mobilise for their rights, seek a better life, and demand accountable rule. Responding to and supporting these populations is a critical strategic opportunity and moral imperative of our time. Thus, as more movements emerge to challenge autocrats, the primary question facing the global democratic community is: are we prepared? What changes should be made now so that democratic actors are ready to offer more impactful support when pro-democracy and human rights movements arise in places like Belarus, Iran, Sudan, and other countries?

Building on research and practice over the last decade, below are several key lessons for how to do so.

### CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Movements have proven able to overcome adverse conditions and succeed against violent autocratic adversaries. However, the more open political space a society has, and the more external actors can constrain and limit an autocrat's repression, the more conducive the environment is to movement success.

Therefore, democratic foreign policy should seek to foster favourable conditions for movements, and act in greater alignment with movement needs and goals. For example, diplomats should more actively seek out and listen to movement representatives and ask them what assistance they require. Democratic states should apply greater conditionality in trade and security agreements to uphold civic space. Institutions designing sanctions should more actively seek out civil society input.

In addition, just as networks of authoritarian regimes oppose movements, democratic governments can improve collaboration amongst themselves to enable movements. This can include more coordinated efforts to develop rapid and targeted multilateral sanctions; to gather evidence and report on repression by autocrats; to strengthen judicial accountability mechanisms; and to advance an international norm of a "right to assistance", grounded in the rights of populations to request and receive certain forms of support to advance democratic change.<sup>8</sup>

### ADAPT THE DEMOCRACY SUPPORT TOOLKIT

Beyond creating an enabling environment, the global democratic community must also innovate. The world has changed dramatically in ten years—has the pace of adaptation in democracy support kept up?

This can begin with a re-evaluation of current programmes. For example, democracy support approaches that are based on the assumption of a friendly or neutral operating environment may need to be rapidly revised if a country turns hostile or shows signs of backsliding. In countries where independent civil society organisations have been curtailed or outlawed in recent years, programmes may need to be substantially modified to channel support to informal entities. Initiatives that are premised on institutional mechanisms functioning properly may also need to significantly adjust their approach if those institutions become corrupted or captured. Elections, the legal system, and registered CSOs can still have an important role to play in such cases, but expanding support to movements can create space for independent CSOs to function and apply pressure to ensure institutional means work as intended.

### ADOPT A MOVEMENT MINDSET

Democratic actors must also have a "movement mindset" as they consider strategic and tactical options for support.<sup>9</sup> This approach consists of adopting an expanded concept of civil society, an emphasis on listening to and leadership by local partners, and recognition that flexibility and adaptability are key elements of successful assistance.

Movements often start among marginalised populations (which at times can comprise a large percentage of a country's population living under autocracy), and key actors within movements may be formal or informal, registered or unregistered. For this reason, those who wish to help must see traditionally overlooked communities and small or informal groups as potential sources of power, and they should actively seek out and listen to those who are organising from these bases. Simple questions, such as "what are you doing?", "why?", "what do you want to achieve?", and "how can we help?" provide the basis for relationship building and potential engagement.

8 Merriman, H., Quirk, P. & Jain, A. (2023) *Fostering a Fourth Democratic Wave: A Playbook for Countering the Authoritarian Threat*, The Atlantic Council.

9 Stephan, M. J., Lakhani, S. & Naviwala, N. (2015) *Aid to Civil Society: A Movement Mindset*, United States Institute for Peace Special Report, no. 261.



Emphasising local ownership and decision-making is also critical in movement work. Movements draw their strength from their ability to unify, organise, and mobilise mass participation of ordinary people in strategic and targeted ways. This means that movement organisers and leaders must be attuned to the grievances and aspirations of various population groups and speak in language that resonates with them. Activists know their own local context best and have the most invested in their country's path. Thus, external support should seek to supplement, rather than marginalise or replace, local leadership and strategies.

Movements also can be fluid and focus on different issue areas over time. For example, Sudan's 2019 pro-democracy movement that ended the rule of autocrat Omar al-Bashir has roots in voter registration efforts by the *Girifna* ("We're Fed Up") movement in the 2010 election; in anti-austerity protests that evolved to calls for democracy in 2013; in widespread *mubadarat* ("initiatives") and "demand groups" that began engaging local issue-based mobilisation around the country in 2013; and in professional associations that concerned themselves with workers' wages and working conditions.<sup>10</sup> Many of these efforts were informal and unregistered, illustrating the fact that movements may also need different modalities on how to apply for, manage, or report back on various forms of assistance. For this reason, flexibility and lowering bureaucratic requirements are often central considerations in working effectively with them.

## COORDINATE WITH THE BROADER GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY

Lastly, as movements grow, their needs and goals change based on their phase of development and evolving circumstances. This means that a variety of democratic actors are best suited to support movements over time.

One of the most impactful periods to engage with movements is their early organising phase, when they are still forming and before high visibility mobilisation or media coverage.<sup>11</sup> Support for analysis, strategic planning, coalition building, training, and workshops during this crucial phase can constructively influence subsequent developments.<sup>12</sup>

Once movements shift to peak mobilisation, they are aggressively targeted by their opponents, and enter a period where they need rapid support as activists respond to quickly developing events.

After peak mobilisation, widespread public actions can decrease due to repression and/or exhaustion, but movements continue to fight for their goals during these periods of protracted struggle. Another movement phase occurs during times of transition, in which movements can constructively influence elections and negotiations, and help counter potential spoilers such as coups d'état. Then in the post-transition phase, movements can play a critical role holding new leaders accountable and pushing back on endemic causes of democratic backsliding such as corruption and inequality.

Because no single entity is best situated to address these evolving opportunities and challenges, movement support should be coordinated among diverse actors, both governmental and non-governmental. Each has their own comparative advantages in this work. Research tells us that coordination among movement allies significantly increases the effectiveness of their efforts.<sup>13</sup> Regular convenings to clarify roles and strategies are worth the investment.

10 Abbashar, A. (2023) *Resistance Committees and Sudan's Political Future*, PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform; Marovic M. and Hayder Z. (2022) *Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolent Action in Sudan*, United States Institute for Peace Special Report, no. 509.

11 Merriman, H., Quirk, P. & Jain, A. (2023) *Fostering a Fourth Democratic Wave: A Playbook for Countering the Authoritarian Threat*, The Atlantic Council.

12 Chenoweth, E. & Stephan, M.J. (2021) *The Role of External Support in Nonviolent Campaigns: Poisoned Chalice or Holy Grail?*, International Center on Nonviolent Conflict.

13 Chenoweth, E. & Stephan, M.J. (2021) *The Role of External Support in Nonviolent Campaigns: Poisoned Chalice or Holy Grail?*, International Center on Nonviolent Conflict; Naimark-Rowse, B. (2022) *Dollars and Dissent: Donor Support for Grassroots Organizing and Nonviolent Movements*, International Center on Nonviolent Conflict.

## APPLYING THESE LESSONS IN THE NEXT DECADE

The trend of increasing movements worldwide is likely to continue, which presents a defining opportunity for democracy advocates. Meeting this circumstance will require shifts in strategies and new options for democracy support. Responses should be based on clear-eyed assessment of present circumstances and future trends, rather than the comfort of the familiar, or outdated practices from the past. Institutional inertia and attitudes of risk aversion cannot become excuses for inaction. Time is not neutral and must be weighed against the urgency and need to respond effectively to the authoritarian threat.

Such insights are already applied at places like the European Endowment for Democracy. Established in the wake of the Arab Uprisings (2010-11), in which policymakers felt underprepared for the pro-democracy uprisings that shook countries across the Middle East and North Africa, movement-centred practices are part of EED's mission. By supporting the unsupported, it has sought to complement other EU and Member State democracy programmes by reaching groups who may not otherwise be eligible for assistance.

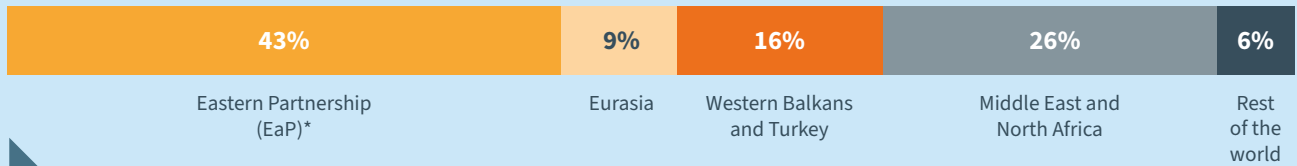
Moreover, in light of current global circumstances, EED's leading efforts should also be seen as an essential pillar of democracy support in their own right. As populations exert bottom-up pressure on autocrats, organisations like EED that embody principles of movement support will be critical players in the next decade's efforts to advance a more peaceful, just, and democratic world.

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# 10 YEARS OF GRANT GIVING 2013-2023

## Applications received by region 2013-2023

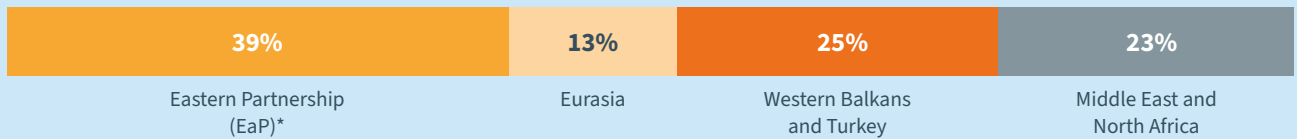


**10,432** applications received 2013-2023



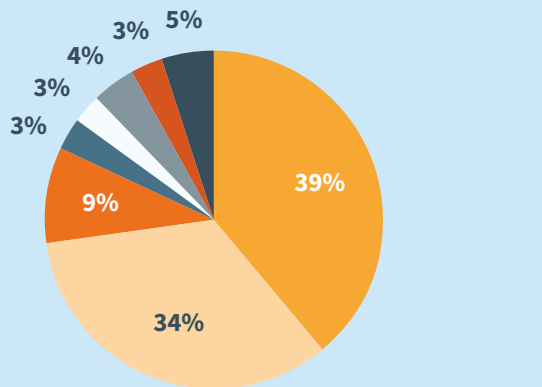
**2,538** grants awarded 2013 - 2023

## Grants awarded by region 2013-2023



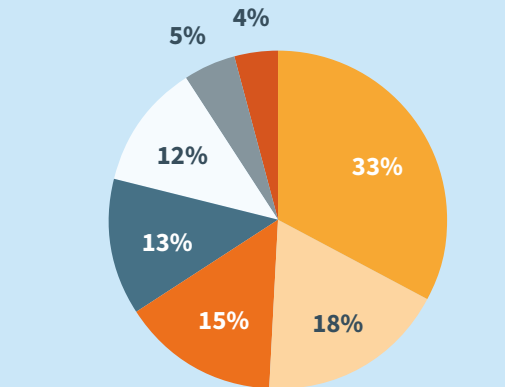
\*For the purpose of this report, Belarus continues to be included within the EaP.

## Grants awarded by thematic area 2013-2023



- 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
- Arts and culture
- Youth
- Anti-corruption and public accountability

## EED's added value 2013-2023



- Core Funding
- Rapid response
- Start-up funding (new actor)
- Under-supported activity
- Political risk
- Start-up funding (new activity)
- Brief Funding

# NEXT TEN YEARS: A VISION FOR EED

BY JERZY POMIANOWSKI  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EUROPEAN ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

**“Considering that democracy is a universal value that includes respect for human rights as enshrined in public international law, in particular the International Bill of Human Rights together with other relevant UN, international and regional texts; considering that democracy is a constituent part of European history [...]**”

**- FROM THE DECLARATION ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EED, 2011<sup>14</sup>**

In June 2023, “A Strategic Orientation Document of the Board of Governors for the Further Development of the European Endowment for Democracy” was adopted by the Board of Governors setting out EED’s strategic choices and priorities for this next period.

EED’s values-based approach implies supporting democratic aspirations wherever they exist. EED has already proven its ability to scale up, and any further expansion of EED’s geographical mandate must be well-prepared, based on a step-by-step, region-by-region approach. It must be well-resourced in terms of grant-making and the structural development of the Secretariat.

Over the next period, EED will continue to prioritise support based on a profound understanding of and respect for local contexts, with EED providing both “wide support”, working with many actors and initiatives, and “deep support”, including intensive coaching, capacity-building and technical assistance.

For many years to come, security will remain the main concern of societies. EED will continue to raise awareness of the interlinkages between democracy and regional security, including when identifying grant support, coaching beneficiaries, and advocating for donor funding, given the long-term security benefits of democracy support.

<sup>14</sup> Declaration on the Establishment of a European Endowment for Democracy, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 20 December 2011, 18683/11.



EED support is an act of democratic solidarity that takes account of societal perspectives and the needs of people, their empowerment and resilience, as the main drivers of change. The international democratic community should reject all types of “foreign agent laws” and promote instead the “right to assist” so no one in need is left without support.

We will further consolidate our flexible support and robust, fast decision-making processes for responding quickly to emergencies and providing long-term values-based support, and we will continue to build trustful relationships with local partners, allowing for locally-driven agendas based on genuine democratic principles and values.

As has been the case since EED’s launch, the safety of grantees and the Secretariat’s staff will continue to be prioritised over the next period. EED will continue to constantly improve and adjust safety procedures to enable it to provide flexible support to democracy activists within the most hostile environments.

EED was established to “add value” and complement existing democracy-support programmes. This allows EED to support groups and activists that cannot be supported by existing EU instruments and that struggle to attract other donor support. EED’s “added value” has evolved over the past decade, with an expansion of EED’s geographic mandate and the increase in earmarked funds, and in some hostile environments in particular, EED’s role has shifted from that of “gap-filler” to main supporter.

It is crucial that in the future, EED can continue to “support the unsupported” in countries, regions and thematic areas that other donors do not or cannot support. We will continue to engage with Member States and the donor community to ensure stable, long-term, non-earmarked funding to respond to democracy activists in under-supported countries, regions and thematic areas.

“Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning” is core to EED’s work, and in the future, it will continue to capture and assess results, identify lessons learned and actively contribute to the international democracy-support community’s efforts to improve the evidence base underlying democracy assistance.

EED will also continue to engage with and collaborate with like-minded organisations, ensuring knowledge-sharing, increasing the impact of support, avoiding duplication and helping to build a stronger community of practice.

Over the next ten years, EED will also work to further develop its knowledge-management, knowledge-sharing and advisory capacity, which is a key part of its role of collecting, analysing and aggregating knowledge from partners on the ground and sharing this with EU institutions and Member States.

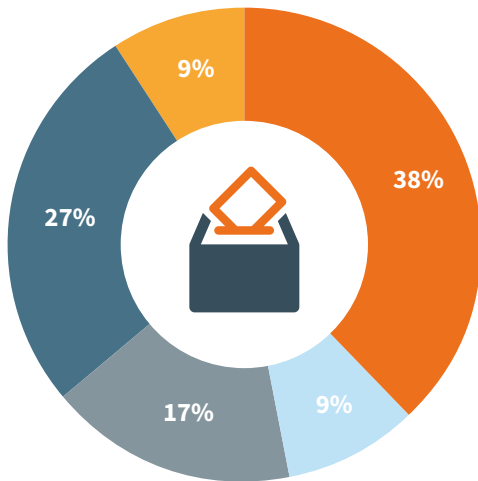
While European Union funding is the largest contribution to EED, EED will continue to seek to broaden and diversify its funding sources while retaining its political and operational independence in line with its statutes.

The approval of this Strategic Orientation document marks the start of the ambitious endeavour of EED’s next phase of development. The Board of Governors and Executive Committee will play an important role in discussing detailed roadmaps and action-plans to implement this broad vision over the coming years.

I look forward to contributing to this work together with the EED team during the next period to ensure that the next ten years of EED’s existence can build on the achievements and lessons learned over our first ten years.

# PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

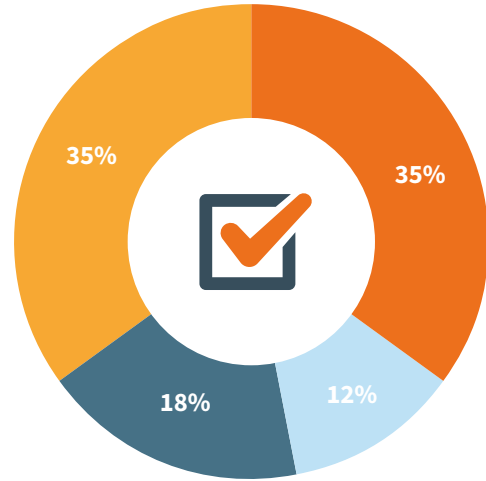
## Applications received by region in 2023



- Eastern Partnership (EAP)\*
- Eurasia
- Middle East and North Africa
- Western Balkans and Turkey
- Rest of the World

**1,326**  
applications received in 2023

## Applications approved by region in 2023

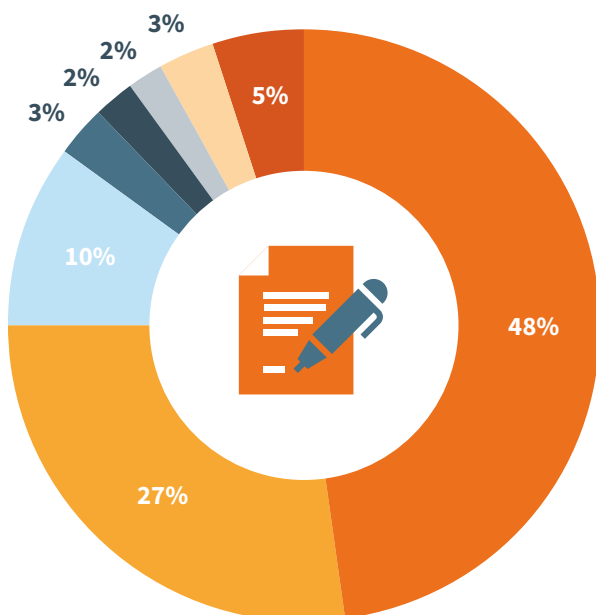


- Eastern Partnership (EAP)
- Eurasia
- Middle East and North Africa
- Western Balkans and Turkey

**381**  
applications approved in 2023

\*For the purpose of this report, Belarus continues to be included with the EaP.

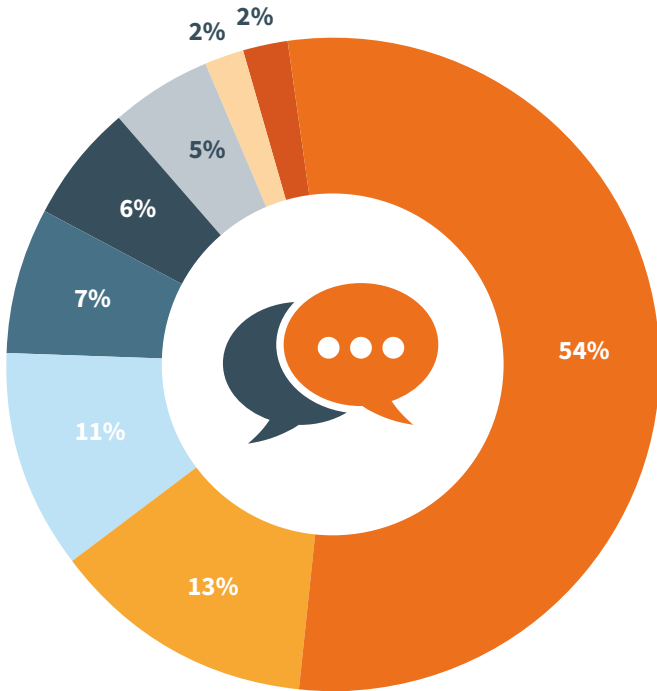
## Grants awarded by thematic area in 2023



- 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
- Arts and culture
- Youth
- Anti-corruption and public accountability



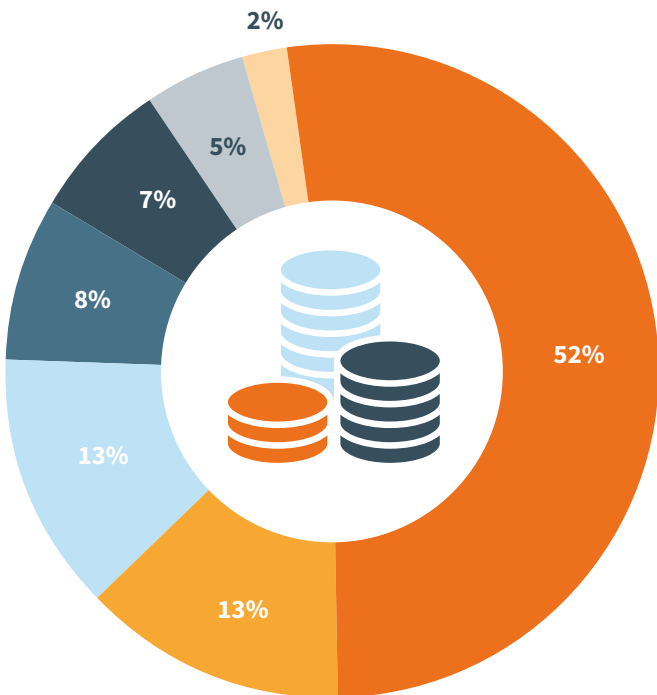
Language of application in 2023



- English
- Ukrainian
- Russian
- Arabic
- Turkish
- BHS\*
- French
- Albanian

\*BHS: languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia.

EED's added value in 2023



- Core funding
- Start-up funding (new actor)
- Rapid response
- Under-supported activity
- Political risk
- Bridge Funding
- Start-up funding (new activity)



# EVENTS

**EED events bring together activists and independent journalists from the regions and countries where EED works with policy makers from European institutions, Member States and the global democracy community.**

In 2023, EED's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, EED organised, co-organised and participated in 32 events, including events held on EED's premises, events held together with partner organisations, and as part of international conferences, and events organised as part of the anniversary celebrations.

In July 2023, in a highlight of this special year, EED held a special **Open Session of the Board of Governors** at the Egmont Palace in Brussels to mark 10 years since its establishment, bringing together EED friends, partners, staff and supporters who have worked with EED over this past decade.

In another highlight of the anniversary year, EED hosted the first **Transatlantic Dialogue** as part of a **Democracy Support Summit** in September 2023 with members from the democracy support community from both sides of the Atlantic in attendance. As part of this event, EED was the leading organiser of the ninth edition of the **International Day of Democracy Brussels** conference, held in the European Committee of the Regions.

During this year, EED also took part in **Forum 2000**, the **Warsaw Security Forum**, and the **World Forum for Democracy**, with EED 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary stands at these events. EED was also one of the co-organisers of **Difference Day** in Brussels, the annual Brussels-based event marking World Press Freedom Day.

In addition, EED held a series of smaller events during the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, including film screenings with post-screening discussions with partners from Turkey, roundtables on Ukraine and Syria, as well as many more beyond the scope of this report.





Bernard Guetta

Pavel Demel  
Vice-Chair

Jerzy Pomianowski  
Executive Director

David McAllister  
Chair

Lisbeth Pilegaard  
Chair



EED Executive Director Jerzy Pomianowski, Chair of the Board of Governors David McAllister MEP, and Chair of the Executive Committee Lisbeth Pilegaard at the EED 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration in the Egmont Palace.  
© Anna Dovie



## EED MARKS 10 YEARS AT OPEN SESSION OF BOARD OF GOVERNORS AT EGMONT PALACE

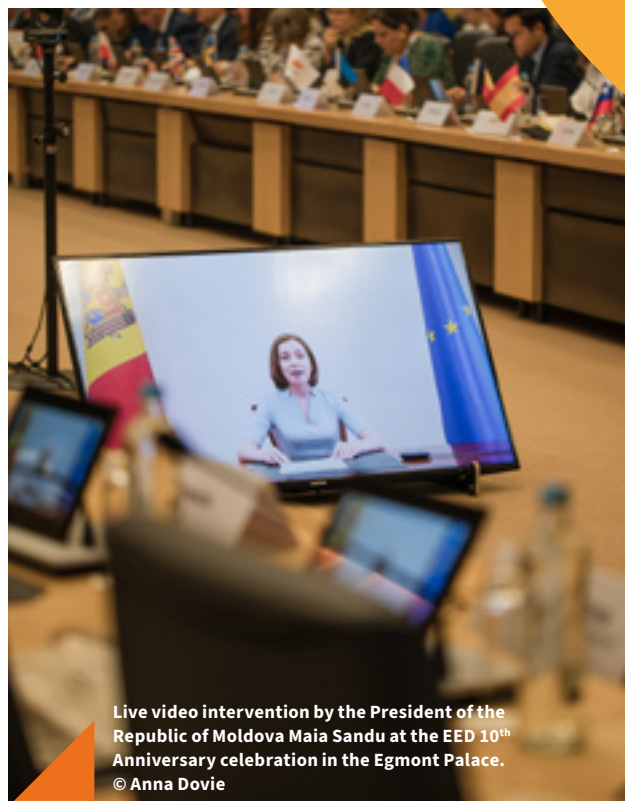
On Monday 3 July, EED celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an Open Session of its Board of Governors at the Egmont Palace in Brussels. Moderated by **David McAllister MEP**, Chair of the EED Board of Governors, the Open Board saw interventions by **Hadja Lahbib**, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs; **Maia Sandu**, President of the Republic of Moldova in a live video intervention; **Eamon Gilmore**, EU Special Representative for Human Rights; **Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya**, Head of United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus; **Oleksandra Matviichuk**, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and director of the Center for Civil Liberties from Ukraine; as well as **Jan Knutsson**, Swedish State Secretary for Foreign Affairs; **Wojciech Gerwel**, Undersecretary of State at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and **Jan Marian**, Czech Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The President of European Commission **Ursula von der Leyen** and the President of the European Parliament **Roberta Metsola** sent video messages to congratulate EED.

The event included a conversation with EED founders, **Radostaw Sikorski**, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland and **Maciej Popowski**, former Deputy Secretary General of European External Action Service, moderated by Ambassador **Maria Ligor**, of the EED Executive Committee.

Four EED partners representing all the regions where EED works, took part in a panel discussion moderated by **Pavol Demeš**, Vice-chair of the EED Executive Committee, namely: **Alia Ibrahim** of the Lebanon-based *Daraj*; **Nikola Dimitrov**, North Macedonian activist politician and diplomat; **Toma Istomina** from the *Kyiv Independent*; and **Yaman Akdeniz**, from the Freedom of Expression Association in Turkey.

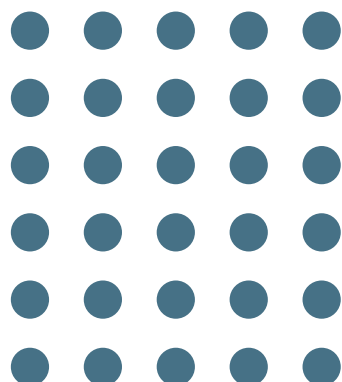
In the final panel of the day, **Lisbeth Pilegaard**, Chair of EED Executive Committee, and **Richard Youngs** of Carnegie Europe, discussed future challenges for EED and the wider democracy support community.



Live video intervention by the President of the Republic of Moldova Maia Sandu at the EED 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration in the Egmont Palace. © Anna Dovie

**“It [EED] helped us during the darkest hours for Moldova’s democracy. Some years ago, Moldova was a state captured by corrupt individuals, a place where those opposing the status quo were subject to constant harassment. EED supported a wide civic forum for transparency, unity and change. It brought together democracy activists, media representatives and members of civil society all united in their determination to fight corruption and the oligarchs”**

**- MAIA SANDU,  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**







© Anna Dovie

**“For ten years, EED was with us in our fight for a free and democratic Belarus. The fight for democracy needs energy, passion and strong commitment. This fight cannot be won alone. It needs friends and allies who not only believe in freedom, but who are ready to invest in it. In 2020, during our peaceful revolution, we saw the renaissance of the Belarusian nation”**

**- SVIATLANA TSIKHANOUSKAYA, HEAD OF UNITED TRANSITIONAL CABINET OF BELARUS**

**“EED’s work to foster democracy is extremely important because the problem is not that we have authoritarian countries where freedom is shrinking to the size of the prison cells. The problem is also that even in well-developed democracies political forces gain weight which are openly putting into doubt the universal principle of Declaration of Human Rights”**

**- OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK, NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES**

© Anna Dovie



## SYRIAN REFUGEES: CAUGHT IN THE WEB OF “NORMALISATION” AND THE RISKS OF “RETURN” – SIDE EVENT TO THE BRUSSELS VII CONFERENCE ON SYRIA

On 13 June, EED held a side event to the Brussels VII conference on Syria: “Syrian Refugees: Caught in the Web of ‘Normalisation’ and the Risks of ‘Return’”. Speakers representing Syrian civil society groups, independent media and experts discussed how the conditions for return of refugees to Syria are still not in place, despite the ongoing discourse on the topic.

Other issues highlighted during the event were the precarious conditions of Syrians in Turkey and how increasing resentment towards refugees was exploited for votes during the recent election; how deportations are performed under the guise of “voluntary returns” in both Turkey and Lebanon; the importance of supporting independent media in Syria that is documenting human rights violations; and the need for EU-based civil society to be more critical of their governments’ outsourcing of border control to non-EU countries to avoid dealing with the refugee issue.

## A WINNING STRATEGY FOR RECOVERY: UKRAINE REALITY CHECK

On 23 October EED, in partnership with Chatham House, International Renaissance Foundation and Open Society Foundations, held a roundtable to discuss post-war recovery mechanisms for Ukraine and the European Union’s financial assistance package (“Ukraine Facility”).

The event gathered Ukrainian civil society activists, members of the European Parliament, representatives of the Ukraine Service of the European Commission, diplomats from EU Member States and Brussels-based think tanks.

The participants discussed Ukraine’s recovery, focusing on trust-building, opportunities, gaps and lessons learned from rapid rebuilding during war. The speakers highlighted how recovery would be closely linked to Ukraine’s EU integration process and will focus on growth, anti-corruption measures, better business environment, competitive markets, but also social capital, and overall alignment with EU legislation.

Speakers stressed the importance of bottom-up recovery, where civil society is an active part of the decision-making and reconstruction process and cooperates with local authorities, playing an invaluable role in fostering transparency, accountability, and positive change.

## DIFFERENCE DAY

EED was a co-organiser of Difference Day in Brussels to celebrate World Press Freedom Day on 3 May 2023. The theme for this year’s edition was “Speak Freely, Listen Respectfully, Different Opinions Matter”.

EED contributed to the organisation of the panel “Protection of Journalists across the globe”, where journalists in exile Arzu Geybulla and Rewaa Morshed, together with Rob Hartgers of *RGF Magazine*, discussed the threats and harassment faced by journalists worldwide.

Geybulla spoke about her experience as an exiled journalist from Azerbaijan and how she found herself in the middle of a defamation campaign, to the point where she had to deactivate many of her social media accounts.



**“At the start of the [Nagorno-Karabakh] war I wrote essays from a personal standpoint and found thousands of negative and harassing messages on my social media. Leaving your country may not stop the violence and online harassment”**

**- ARZU GEYBULLA**

## L'HEURE D'HIVER ISTANBUL FILM FESTIVAL

EED took part in the *L'Heure d'Hiver* film festival in Brussels, focused on cinema from the MENA region, with the screening of two Turkish films produced with EED's support.

Both movies tackle the topic of freedom of expression and freedom of the self being stifled by political and social constraints. *Incomplete Sentences*, by **Adar Bozbay**, celebrates the courage and resilience of award-winning writer **Aslı Erdoğan**, now living in exile in Germany after facing prosecution in Turkey for her collaboration with a Kurdish newspaper. *This Is Not Me*, directed by **Jeyan Kader Gülşen** and **Zekiye Kaçak**, follows the lives of three gay men forced to hide their sexuality due to family pressure and their conservative environment.

The screenings were followed by discussions with directors Jeyan Kader Gülşen and Zekiye Kaçak and writer Aslı Erdoğan, who discussed their lived experiences of navigating life in an authoritarian and conservative society.



L'Heure d'hiver Istanbul Festival  
at Bozar, Brussels.  
© Anna Dovie

## DEMOCRACY SUPPORT SUMMIT

EED convened a two-day “Democracy Support Summit” to mark the 2023 International Day of Democracy, consisting of a Transatlantic Dialogue and the International Democracy Day Brussels event.

### TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE

The closed-door Transatlantic Dialogue brought together members of the democracy support community from both sides of the Atlantic with senior stakeholders from European institutions and Member States for a private dialogue on the evolving democracy environment in which we work. Held six months after the second Summit for Democracy, the timing of this event was opportune given the lack of transatlantic dialogue on democracy support at a political level and shifting geopolitical priorities.



EED Executive Director Jerzy Pomianowski and NED President and CEO Damon Wilson attend the Transatlantic Dialogue in Brussels.  
© ZBS Studio - Tomasz Cibulla



Nathan Law delivers a keynote speech during International Democracy Day Brussels.  
© ZBS Studio - Tomasz Cibulla

### INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY BRUSSELS

The ninth edition of International Democracy Day Brussels took place on 14 and 15 September at the European Committee of the Regions under the title “An Era of Democratic Unrest?”

Experts and activists discussed how the global decline of democracy has been met with a new wave of civic activism. Speakers included **Věra Jourová**, Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency; **H.E. Elena Gómez Castro**, Ambassador of Spain to the EU Political and Security Committee; and **Damon Wilson**, President and CEO of the National Endowment for Democracy.





© ZBS studio - Tomasz Cibulla



EED partner and founder of *Al-Jumhuriya* **Karam Nachar** from Syria and Hong Kong democracy activist **Nathan Law** delivered two powerful keynote speeches presenting the struggle for democracy in their countries and calling for solidarity between democracy movements around the world.

The “Global Faces of Activism” panel with activists **Zaza Abashidze** (Georgia), **Leila Alikarami** (Iran), **Nathan Law** (Hong Kong), and **Olga Rudenko** (Ukraine) touched upon activism as a collective effort; the role of Gen Z in protests and politics; and becoming an activist and advocate at a time of war. EED partners **Tigran Amiryan** from CSN Lab and **Youssef El Idrissi** of KounAktif delivered two lightning talks about their civil society work.

The panel “Policy and democracy community” with **Helena König**, Deputy Secretary General, EEAS; **McDonald Lewanika**, Regional Director, Accountability Lab South Africa; **Sam van der Staak**, Director for Europe, International IDEA; and **Hardy Merriman**, President of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict and a Non-resident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, saw a discussion on the need for politicians to encourage and support youth activism; the need to understand local contexts in order to promote democratisation; and the importance of bottom-up movements to achieve a genuine democratic transition.

“The democratic idea is clearest and most poignant in the places where it battles most for its life, where thousands of people could perish, as in Syria”

- KARAM NACHAR

# ONE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY, MANY CONTEXTS

Ten years ago, in the wake of the Arab Spring, EED was set up with the vision of providing flexible, demand-driven support to democracy activists, responding to local needs.

In 2013, EED was established by the EU and Member States as an independent, complementary mechanism to provide fast and flexible technical and financial support to democratisation and human rights promotion within the European Neighbourhood. Over this past decade, EED has provided context-based, demand-driven support, and has fostered and facilitated initiatives by local actors in 39 countries throughout the European Neighbourhood and beyond, with EED expanding its grant making to Eurasia and to the Western Balkans and Turkey during the period.

Global freedom declined for the 17<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in 2022,<sup>15</sup> and 2023 saw a further decline and a shrinking of civic space and media freedom in many countries where EED works. This was aggravated by the effects of military conflict and natural catastrophes.

There was a rise in authoritarianism in countries across the region, including in North Africa, the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus. In 2022, by one measure, 72 percent of the world's population was estimated to live in autocracies, 28 percent in closed autocracies, and only 13 percent in liberal democracies.<sup>16</sup> Media freedom and freedom of expression were also under increasing pressure, with journalists facing physical and online attacks in many countries, and a culture of impunity meaning that nearly 80 percent of journalist

murders are unsolved globally.<sup>17</sup> A marked increase in disinformation and propaganda is putting further pressure on independent media.

In such a difficult global context, EED's ability to support activists and independent journalists working in situations of shrinking civic and media space is highly pertinent. EED's mandate means that it can provide demand-driven support, regardless of individuals' or organisations' circumstances or the political situations of their countries, and it can respond quickly, and provide this support discreetly, thereby reducing the risk to grant recipients. EED can continue to provide this support in highly repressive contexts, or when activists are forced to leave their countries and to operate from abroad. In this way, EED can support activists' long-term democracy ambitions.

As activists continue to adapt to their new realities and find new ways of defending and building democracy within their environments, the experience of 2023 has yet again proven the relevance of EED's mandate. EED's ability to evolve and adapt to activists' needs as in-country circumstances change is well proven after a decade of operations, and this is reflected in the continuing growth of applications for support to EED, and in the number of initiatives awarded funding.

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15 Freedom House (2023) *Freedom in the World: Marking 50 Years in the Struggle for Democracy*, accessed at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2023/marking-50-years>

16 V-Dem Institute (2023) *Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization*, accessed at: [https://v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem-democracyreport2023\\_lowres.pdf](https://v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem-democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf)

17 Committee to Protect Journalists (2023) 'Haiti joins list of countries where killers of journalists most likely to go unpunished', accessed at: <https://cpj.org/reports/2023/10/haiti-joins-list-of-countries-where-killers-of-journalists-most-likely-to-go-unpunished/>

## THE FOLLOWING PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF CONTEXTS IN WHICH EED PARTNERS WORK IN 2023

### FROM EU CANDIDATES TO AUTOCRATS: SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY IN THE EAST

EED supports a wide range of democracy actors within the Eastern Partnership and beyond, including within the EU candidate countries of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, and in Armenia, where there are vibrant civil society communities, and within the more repressive environments of Belarus and Azerbaijan, where civic activists and independent media operate in highly challenging environments.

In **Ukraine**, civil society remains strong, proactive and at the forefront of protecting reform gains and fundamental democratic freedoms despite the everyday hardship of Russia's full-scale war. Ukraine is simultaneously resisting Russia's aggression and embarking on a far-reaching recovery process, while deepening its integration into the EU. In 2023, EED supported civil society organisations in almost

all *oblasts* (regions) at a time when other donors restricted their support geographically or thematically. As the country context has become more complex and challenging, EED has remained focused on assisting civil society and media organisations to be able to advance democracy even in wartime. This has included: the provision of institutional support to help with increased workload; support to activists and media in particularly high security-risk regions; engaging with marginalised communities; and support to re-start activism after occupation. EED has provided flexible support to community-based organisations dedicated to economic recovery, integration of internally displaced persons and the promotion of social cohesion, youth engagement and empowerment. During the year, EED also supported an important international advocacy platform that amplified the voices of activists by bringing them to Brussels and other EU capitals.



© Dobrochyn Centre



In **Moldova**, during this electoral period, with local elections in 2023, and upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, public support for the pro-European government is fluctuating. The country is experiencing a difficult economic situation. It continues to be significantly affected by Russia's war in Ukraine and there are large numbers of refugees. Russian disinformation is rampant. Corruption remains a significant issue, however, this year saw the establishment of a new Anti-Corruption Court. During 2023, EED supported initiatives working to increase civic participation and engagement in local government, anti-corruption actions, and initiatives ensuring access to alternative narratives and countering disinformation.

In **Georgia**, while the political discourse has focused on the country's EU membership candidacy and democratic reforms, the operational environment for civil society organisations has continued to decline. While the ruling party failed to pass a draft law on "Transparency of Foreign Influence" following mass protests, various legislative changes have been introduced that affect civil society and independent media, and civic space and freedom of expression are increasingly under threat. In 2023, EED supported civil society and independent media to strengthen their role as watchdogs and supported their efforts to continue pushing for democratic reforms.

In **Armenia**, a country still traumatised by the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020, the arrival of 100,000 displaced Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh following Azerbaijan's 24-hour military operation on 19-20 September 2023, has put significant additional pressure on society and public services. Civil activists and grassroots activists, among them many EED partners, as well as businesses and individuals stepped up to assist the displaced people, filling gaps in state provision. EED's media partners have documented the crisis, and are providing legal support to fallen soldiers, and employment support to displaced journalists.

In **Belarus**, three years after the quashing of the pro-democracy movement and mass demonstrations, the regime has continued to purge independent voices and persecute human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, opposition politicians and activists. According to the Belarusian human rights organisation Viasna, at the end of the year there were 1,456 political prisoners, with terms of imprisonment arbitrarily extended to put further pressure on prisoners. In February, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment, part of a further wave of convictions of human rights activists, journalists, and individual citizens in Belarus. EED's discreet support has enabled continued assistance to Belarusian activists and media working both inside and outside the country.

In **Azerbaijan**, the situation for civil society and human rights defenders remains extremely challenging, with at least 204 people, among them bloggers, journalists, members of opposition parties and movements, behind bars, double the number of 2022. Steps are also being taken to implement media legislation, which includes launching a registry for journalists and media outlets, with unregistered outlets facing potential legal charges.

### **WAR AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING: SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY IN THE MENA REGION**

The war in Gaza that erupted in October 2023 following the Hamas attack on Israel is one of the biggest crises facing the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in recent years, with significant repercussions throughout the region. The region was already experiencing democratic backsliding and anti-European sentiments have increased due to the perceived double-standards of European countries to the war. Civil society and independent media throughout the region already operate in difficult legal and political environments, with civic freedom and freedom of expression under threat in most countries, and minority groups such as LGBT+ individuals facing particular repression.

In **Palestine and Israel**, Hamas' terrorist attack on south Israel and Israel's ensuing air and ground offensive on Gaza have had a devastating and traumatising effect on both societies. In Gaza, civilians have experienced an unprecedented level of targeting, attacks, mistreatment and fatalities, with over 20,000 deaths by the end of the year. The war has taken a severe toll on journalists in the region. At the end of 2023, international organisations were warning of impending famine and devastating infectious disease outbreaks in Gaza due to restricted access to food, medication, sanitation, clean water, humanitarian aid and the ongoing electric blackouts causing disruptions to communication and hospital operations. Violence has escalated in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and 307 Palestinians were killed during the period, 79 of them children. The number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails doubled during the first two weeks of the war alone. During this period, EED's media and human rights partners have played a vital role in combatting misinformation, making efforts to accurately report on the situation, raising awareness of violations of human rights, and advocating for justice and accountability.



**Egypt** continues to grapple with a dire economic crisis, the collapse of its currency, depleted currency reserves and soaring inflation, all of which have stoked public discontent as millions cannot afford basic necessities. The human rights situation in the country remains critical, with many enforced disappearances, and appalling prison conditions, where torture, medical neglect and deaths are commonplace. 538 individuals were sentenced to the death penalty in 2022, a one-third increase from the previous year. There are severe limitations on free expression in the media and on freedom of assembly. The National Dialogue process, which began in May in an environment of deep-seated mistrust, as critics of the regime faced ongoing persecution, was suspended prior to the presidential elections. During the year, EED continued to provide essential repeat funding and long-term support to partners in Egypt, crucial to sustain civil society efforts amid ongoing challenges and changing conditions. Legal aid was also vital, enabling human rights groups to operate transparently. EED also responded to evolving needs, bridging funding gaps during transitions to a new legal status under a new NGO law.

In **Lebanon**, the southern border has seen deadly escalations between Israel and Hezbollah since the beginning of the Gaza war, leading to the displacement of 72,437 individuals from the south and the deaths of over 100 people. This escalation occurs amidst the ongoing political and economic crisis in the country. There is still no elected president a year on from presidential elections and 77 percent of Lebanese families and more than 90 percent of Syrian refugees cannot afford basic necessities. In a blow to the country's democratic progress, municipal elections were postponed until 2024. A new Public Prosecutor of the Beirut Port Explosion was appointed, following the suspension of the previous prosecutor, and all those detained in the case were released. The year was marked by increased aggression against protesters, refugees, independent media, and the LGBT+ community. Despite all this, Lebanon's civil society remains vibrant, and its independent media is among the most successful in the region, with a wide youth readership. During the year, EED continued its support to several national and local independent media, enabling them to strengthen their sustainability. EED funded several initiatives that address rights and freedoms and political participation and it supported vital cultural spaces that merge arts with various forms of activism.

In **Tunisia**, the period since the president's coup of 25 July 2021 has seen the adoption of various measures that have progressively unravelled the rule of law and undermined the country's fragile democracy. Executive power over the legislature and judiciary has been extended and there are now few checks and balances. Threats of more restrictive legislation on associations pose a significant challenge to civic freedom. A cybercrime decree law that came into effect in 2022 is further tightening freedom of expression, with arrests and criminal investigations launched against political opponents, journalists, lawyers, and human rights activists, accused of spreading false information or rumours. In this context of democratic backsliding, EED's independent media partners play an increasingly important watchdog and information role. EED supports grassroots initiatives, that are fostering awareness of human rights and democracy among marginalised communities.



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**Syria** continues to grapple with a deadlocked political process and protracted instability across the country. The earthquake and aftershocks of February 2023 exacerbated already difficult living conditions for vulnerable local populations in opposition-held areas in the northwest and accelerated the “normalisation” process with the Assad regime. Despite lingering security risks, pressure on refugees in neighbouring countries to return to Syria increased. The year also saw the outbreak of mass protests in As-Suwayda in the south of the country, with peaceful protesters calling openly for the downfall of the Assad regime. As-Suwayda’s protests reverberated across the Syrian territory including opposition areas, primarily in the northwest where demonstrations were held in solidarity with the movement. Within this volatile context, EED was able to quickly respond to emerging needs. Following the earthquake in February, EED launched an emergency response that proved to be vital to its partners. EED has also supported diverse grassroots entities, including those covering unfolding events on the ground, and those working to empower communities, raising awareness of issues that concern them.

**Jordan** remains one of the most secure countries in the region; however, the past year has seen a decline in civil, political and socio-economic rights and an intensifying crackdown on civic space. In 2023, the parliament approved a highly contentious cybercrimes law, further undermining free speech, threatening internet users’ right to anonymity and paving the way for a surge in online censorship. This is likely to have major repercussions on political participation. Civil society struggles with restrictive foreign funding control mechanisms, with more projects rejected in recent years, and many non-profit organisations are forced to register as for-profit organisations to continue operating. In Jordan, EED remains actively engaged in identifying organisations that present innovative approaches to address the democratic challenges facing the country. The current portfolio is mainly directed towards supporting independent media outlets that deliver reliable news reporting, analytical insights on local and international matters, and creative content that challenges societal norms.

In **Libya** the political stalemate continues with the co-existence of two parallel governments. Prospects of legislative and presidential elections remain elusive, despite national and international efforts. The country is wracked by instability, and armed clashes between feuding parties are



commonplace. In September, when at least 4,333 died and over 40,000 people were displaced following the Derna dam collapses, civil society was united in its efforts to provide urgent disaster relief to the affected communities and investigate the causes behind the disaster. However, calls for accountability were met with an intensified crackdown by local authorities. The overall repression campaign against activists, journalists, human rights defenders, and bloggers continues, with many facing arbitrary detentions. There has been a further shrinking of civic space; the authorities recently announced that only organisations registered under a Gaddafi era law are recognised as non-governmental organisations. During the year, EED’s ability to provide discrete funding meant it was able to support partners working on election issues, with the focus now shifting to local elections. EED’s support has also helped to strengthen independent media outlets, that act as vital platforms for championing human rights and democracy.

## DEFENDING DEMOCRACY FROM FURTHER BACKSLIDING: THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

In the Western Balkans, EED supports grassroots activists, including many environmental activists, start-up groups and independent media. EED's support to democracy activists and independent media was particularly valuable during this year's electoral period in Turkey.

In **Albania**, EED partners report that state capture and political patronage of the ruling party remain strong, despite political scandals and high-level corruption cases. Key concerns include the ruling party's access to state databases with citizens' personal information and their abuse of this information, massive public private partnership projects implemented with no environmental or social assessments, and a politicised judicial system. The media market is oversaturated and is dominated by a handful of economic and political interests. In Albania, EED fills gaps in civil society activism, and focuses on community mobilisation, community groups and media.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, there was worrying democratic backsliding in the Republika Srpska entity during the year, with some spillover effect on the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite a significant civil society campaign, including by EED partners, Republika Srpska saw the recriminalisation of defamation and the introduction of a Law on Agents of Foreign Influence. The Republika Srpska authorities have intensified their secessionist narratives, and this has put the constitutional order under pressure. Ethnic tensions are on the rise throughout the country. This year, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina finally managed to form a government, the first since the 2018 election. This contributed to the European Commission's recommendation that accession talks on EU membership be launched, however civil society and independent media report that there is lack of political will for reforms.

In **Kosovo\***, the socio-political agenda is heavily dominated by high-level politics, such as the EU-mediated dialogue with Serbia and rising tensions in northern Kosovo. In September, a group of heavily armed men entered Kosovo from Serbia clashing with the Kosovo police, leaving one police officer and four gunmen dead. Both Kosovo and EU officials called out the act as terrorism, and it is likely it was sponsored by state structures in Serbia. While the situation has now calmed, tensions remain high in the region. Internally, the public sphere is heavily polarised. Media organisations struggle to survive in an oversaturated market, and there has been an increase in physical and online attacks against journalists, as well as a proliferation of fake news and

disinformation. In Kosovo, EED is focused on hybrid start-ups within media and civil society, and there is a particular focus on providing support to formal and informal youth groups.

In **Montenegro**, public institutions continue to perform poorly. While the recently established government has confirmed its Western and EU course, society continues to be polarised, with the media sector reflecting the increasing partisan and ethnic division in the country. During the year, EED provided support to civil society and media actors that promote civic values, through culture, community engagement, and reporting that promotes critical thinking.

In **North Macedonia**, lack of judicial independence remains a significant issue, and amendments to the criminal code are likely to have a negative effect on the fight against organised crime and corruption. While civil society is diverse and active, space for civil society is shrinking and relations with local government have worsened during the year. Most media are highly influenced by political interests. This year, EED focused on providing start-up support to both informal groups and newly established organisations.

In **Serbia**, there was a wave of protests following two mass shootings in May, with protesters demanding an end to the promotion of violence in the media and accusing the government of creating an atmosphere of violence and aggression in society. EED supports civil society actors focused on civic participation and community engagement, with EED support complementing that provided by the European Commission as part of the EU integration processes. However, democracy activists and journalists face increased pressure, legal proceedings, and physical and verbal attacks. A new media law could see more state ownership of media, legitimising a previously illegal practice. During the year, EED continued to provide significant support to independent media, ensuring citizens' access to unbiased information and providing a counterbalance to rising levels of disinformation.

In **Turkey**, the pre- and post-election period, which saw the re-election of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, took place in an environment dominated by pro-government and state-owned media, and a further erosion of women's and LGBT+ rights. EED supported civil society organisations that monitored and observed the elections and mobilised hundreds of thousands of volunteers to ensure transparency and accountability of the election process. EED's partners are currently lobbying to safeguard LGBT+ rights that are threatened by proposed constitutional amendments.

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.



# EED'S THEMATIC AREAS OF WORK

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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 activists operate in very different contexts, they are united by their determination to build better and more democratic futures for their countries. This section of the Annual Report takes an in-depth look at the work of a selection of EED's partners during 2023 across the various thematic areas of operation.



# I. ANTI-CORRUPTION AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Corruption is a major barrier to advancing democracy. All democracies need actors and mechanisms that can serve as checks and balances to corruption, and promote accountability, transparency and oversight of governance.

EED helps build the capacities of citizens and grassroots independent voices who are demanding accountability of their governments, exposing corrupt practices and seeking to develop anti-corruption practices within their societies.

## EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023

EED supports a wide range of partners across the European Neighbourhood and beyond who are determined to tackle corruption within their societies and to rebuild public overview and trust in public institutions.

EED's flexible funding mechanisms enable it to support anti-corruption efforts within open environments, as well as in more closed environments, where activists often have little access to other donor funding due to government repression or political and security concerns. In this section, we profile the **Belarus Investigative Centre**; and **Primăria Alternativă** from Moldova.



## MOLDOVA

### PRIMĂRIA ALTERNATIVĂ – PROVIDING FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE CHISINAU MUNICIPALITY

It was the death of a young child on Chisinau’s roads that brought together the five co-founders of Primăria Alternativă (PMAN), including economist and urban planner Roman Guniavii, Alla Revenco, founder of the Solidarity Parents association, animal protection activist Anastasia Cozlovscaia, and a well-known cartoonist, Alex Buret.

“We put a drawing of the young victim in front of the mayor’s office. We wanted to remind him that the municipality had never addressed unsafe pedestrian crossings in Chisinau,” explains Roman.

Following the success of this campaign, the group came together on a more permanent basis. They see PMAN as a platform to discuss constructively the problems of the city that are not included in the agenda of meetings at the mayor’s office. The abbreviation PMAN was deliberate, as it is also that of Chisinau mayor’s party. They are one of the only organisations focusing on the municipality’s activities, a major gap as Roman sees it, with serious issues such as corruption, non-transparent use of the municipal budget, and questionable municipal decisions receiving little coverage in the media.

Its members attend and broadcast municipal meetings, expose sources of corruption, and bring attention to complex city management issues through easily accessible graphic videos, political satire and social media posts. They are also planning to help citizens prepare petitions, complaints, and information requests.

“Corruption is a huge issue here, but no one wants to do anything. Unfortunately, Moldovans don’t have grand expectations. I show them what is possible when it comes to urban planning.”

**“Corruption is a huge issue here, but no one wants to do anything. Unfortunately, Moldovans don’t have grand expectations. I show them what is possible when it comes to urban planning”**

**- ROMAN GUNIAVII**

© Primăria Alternativă



# Stanislau Ivashkevich

## BELARUS

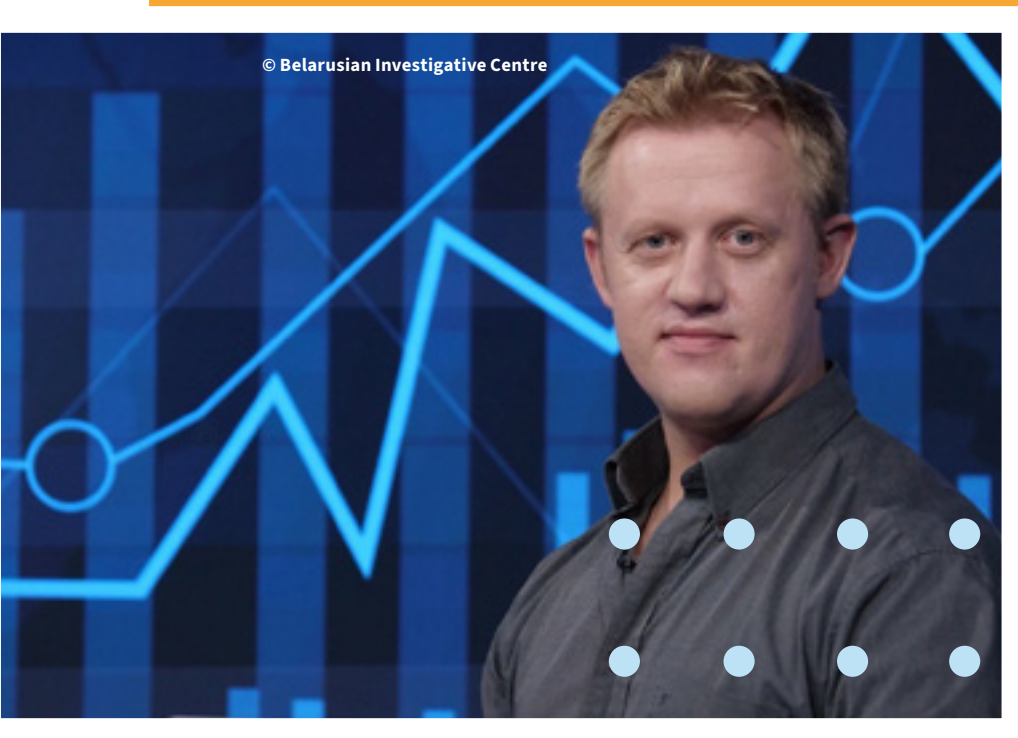
### **BELARUSIAN INVESTIGATIVE CENTRE: DEBUNKING FAKE NEWS AND INVESTIGATING CORRUPTION FROM EXILE**

Journalist Stanislau Ivashkevich founded the Belarusian Investigative Centre (BIC) in 2019. BIC investigates corruption in the country, uncovering cases of money laundering and sanctions evasion.

When the 2020-21 protests in Belarus were met with harsh repression by the Lukashenko regime, the BIC team initially used it to its advantage. “Most of the repression was done by plain-clothed police. So we could easily pretend to be police, approach people, even officials,” says Stanislau.

When the regime subsequently increased repression against journalists, Stanislau was arrested, as were many of his colleagues. All members of the BIC team were forced to flee the country and they are now working from exile.

BIC collaborates with major media outlets and journalism networks and works to show how Belarusian officials can easily evade EU sanctions. The group has uncovered a total of \$1 billion in corruption schemes through Lithuania, Serbia and Cyprus.



# II. INDEPENDENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

**A free and independent media is an essential part of democracy. Independent journalists provide platforms for debate, deliver unbiased news and reporting, fight disinformation and hold authorities to account ensuring accountability and transparency.**

Across the regions where EED works, journalists and media professionals are working in challenging conditions, with increased aggressiveness by the authorities in many countries and growing animosity towards journalists on social media and in the physical world. The 2023 World Press Freedom Index highlighted the effect of the digital fake content industry on press freedom, with two-thirds of the 180 countries it evaluated reporting that political actors in their countries were systematically involved in massive disinformation or propaganda campaigns.<sup>18</sup> This report also points to the blurring between true and false narratives that increasingly jeopardise the right to information, and states that the fast development of artificial intelligence is wreaking further havoc on the media world.

In Russia, since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Kremlin's ruthless crackdown on independent media saw all independent media banned, blocked, declared "foreign agents" or "undesirable organisations" and a mass exodus of journalists from the country. Many western media can no longer be accessed inside Russia. In Belarus,

journalists have faced large-scale repression since the brutal crackdown of the 2020 protests. Today, 36 journalists are behind bars, and most independent media only operate from abroad. In Ukraine, journalists grapple with the difficulties and dangers of reporting on a country at war, and the importance of continuing to ensure transparency and accountability of the authorities, while engaged in a constant fight against Russian propaganda.

Press freedom is severely curtailed throughout the Middle East and North Africa, with Syria one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, followed by Yemen and Iraq.<sup>19</sup> The war in Gaza accounted for 72 percent of the global fatalities among journalists in 2023, making it the deadliest war for journalists since documentation began in 1990.<sup>20</sup> An estimated 77 journalists have been killed since the 7 October Hamas attacks on Israel, including 70 Palestinians, 4 Israeli and 3 Lebanese.<sup>21</sup> These include the journalists Belal Jadallah and Mohammad Al Jaja of EED's partner Press House Gaza.

18 RSF (2023) '2023 World Press Freedom Index - journalism threatened by fake content industry', accessed at: <https://rsf.org/en/2023-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-threatened-fake-content-industry>

19 RSF (2023) 'Africa: Under the yoke of authoritarian regimes', accessed at: <https://rsf.org/en/region/middle-east-north-africa>

20 Reliefweb (2023) 'Ninety-four journalists killed in 2023, says IFJ', 13 December 2023, accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ninety-four-journalists-killed-2023-says-ifj>

21 CPJ (2023) 'Israel-Gaza war takes record toll on journalists', 21 December 2023, accessed at: <https://cpj.org/2023/12/israel-gaza-war-takes-record-toll-on-journalists/>



The situation in North Africa has deteriorated with increasing authoritarianism in both Tunisia and Morocco, and repression against the few remaining independent media and journalists in Algeria has intensified. In Turkey, there is a widening state crackdown against press freedom, and the disinformation law adopted in 2022 means that journalists and social media users can face up to three years in prison.

In Azerbaijan, new legislation adopted in December 2021 has meant that a registry of journalists and media outlets has been launched, and officials have warned that unregistered outlets will face legal charges.

Most countries of the Western Balkans have experienced a decline in media freedom in recent years, with some attacks against journalists, particularly in Serbia, frequent self-censorship and intimidation and structural factors affecting the sector.

### **EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023**

EED funds a wide range of media, ranging from hyper-local media outlets and bloggers to more established outlets. This support can include core funding to outlets, bridge funding in the case of funding shortfalls, and smaller project-based funding. Support is particularly vital in more repressive environments, where EED's flexible funding mechanisms mean it can provide safe and discreet support to key non-state actors who can ensure alternative narratives and coverage of news stories not present in other media.

This section includes profiles of a selection of the many media supported by EED during 2023 and over the past 10 years, including outlets from Turkey, Iraq, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia, Kosovo and Jordan.

## **PRESS HOUSE GAZA**

**Belal Jadallah**  
(1 MAY 1978 – 19 NOVEMBER 2023)

**Mohammed Al Jaja**  
(23 FEBRUARY 1992 – 6 NOVEMBER 2023)

Belal Jadallah, founder and general director of Press House Gaza, was a seasoned journalist, who was regarded as a pioneer and mentor in his field. He worked closely with the international community. Mohammed Al Jaja was the organisation development consultant.

Press House Gaza is an internationally respected and well known independent platform for free and independent media in Palestine dedicated to training the region's future journalists. Since 2013, it has worked to facilitate the development of an independent Palestinian media reflecting the concepts and principles of democracy and freedom of expression. In 2021, an EED grant helped Press House establish a legal support unit to assist journalists across Palestine, raising awareness of their rights, and documenting and monitoring violations.

In a recent interview with EED, Mohammed spoke of the dangers faced by journalists in Gaza and the importance of their work. "Our lives are not numbers. What we try to do as journalists is to publicise the many stories from Palestine and the suffering of our people. Our destiny is to live in Palestine, but we don't want to be treated like victims or collateral damage," he said.

## IRAQ

### JUMMAR: CREATING IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS WITH IRAQI YOUTH

“The word *Jummar* means palm heart in Arabic and it is rooted in the heart of Iraqi society. It symbolises what we wanted to do. We are addressing issues at the heart of Iraqi society,” explain the team members of the online media outlet *Jummar*.

Launched in October 2022, on the third anniversary of the 2019 protests, the largest in Iraq’s modern history, *Jummar* was established as the first creative and ethical independent media in the country. It has quickly become popular, particularly among youth.

“Young people make up over half the population of Iraq. They are a generation without hope. They are frustrated by the collapse of the state, mass corruption and a lack of reliable information,” explains *Jummar*’s co-founder Omar Al-Jaffal.

*Jummar*’s coverage of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invasion of Iraq brought it to international media attention. So far, it has collaborated with international media including *The Guardian* and the *Courrier International*.

Many of the media’s contributors are women and queer people, some with no previous journalistic experience, others writing under pseudonyms. They approach issues that are important to their readership from a social perspective, with articles on the environment, the economy, educational campaigns and everyday life.

“We ask journalists to document and fact-check everything. This is not the norm in the Iraqi media scene, and some journalists initially see this as an attack on their professional integrity. We know that in the long run, this approach is helping us build a culture of professional independent journalism in Iraq,” says Haneen Naameh, another co-founder.

© Atef Al-Jaffal





**“Young people make up over half the population of Iraq. They are a generation without hope. They are frustrated by the collapse of the state, mass corruption and a lack of reliable information”**

**- OMAR AL-JAFFAL**





© Mautskebeli

## GEORGIA

### MAUTSKEBELI: EMPOWERING CITIZENS THROUGH MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Launched in 2021 and working from two offices in Tbilisi and Batumi, *Mautskebeli* is an independent digital media focusing on social justice issues under-reported in the mainstream media.

*Mautskebeli* reports on protests and social movements, and it is often the only media connecting local communities with the rest of the country. Its journalists were the first to provide extensive coverage of miners' strikes in the industrial city of Chiatura, where multiple workers went on hunger strike.

"Thanks to our coverage of different strikes, many workers managed to win their fights," says co-founder Natia Karchiladze. "They got better working conditions and salaries and daily coverage helped keep their story in the news."

*Mautskebeli* has a particular focus on marginalised communities, minorities and other repressed groups in the country. "We're often the only platform on the ground in different localities. The people we talk to tend to be left out of the democratic process," says Natia.



© Mautskebeli

**"The people we talk to tend to be left out of the democratic process"**

**- NATIA KARCHILADZE**



## JORDAN

### MADRAJ: BUILDING A MEDIA ECOSYSTEM TO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY

“We need citizens who can push back and demand their right to a democratic state. Independent journalism is the main pillar to do that,” says Rawan Jayousi, founder and director of *MADRAJ: Media and Digital Runway for Arab Journalists*.

Independent media in the MENA region face multiple challenges, including financial problems, legal restrictions, media freedom issues, and a breakdown of trust between society and the media. *MADRAJ* is working to address these issues by building a community of empowered journalists, incubating projects, accelerating alternative media startups, and carrying out research on key media issues and digitalisation of media business models to enable sustainability.

“Many incubators target scientists, engineers, and the IT sector, but in the media, data and information are also products. Why can’t we look at independent journalism through the lens of business, innovation, and technology?” she asks.



## SERBIA:

### ASSOCIATION OF CITIZENS “A1 NET”

Two independent media entities, *A1 net* and *Radio 100 Plus*, have joined forces to provide the citizens of the Sandžak region, in southwestern Serbia, with reliable news reporting. This is a region dominated by politically controlled media outlets.

*A1.net* regularly reports on local government activities and environmental issues in Sandžak and in 2023, it organised important pre-election debates in the city of Novi Pazar, fostering a level of democratic engagement in local media rarely seen in the past decade.

The media has launched a female-focused podcast “Mahala”, that explores issues faced by women in the Sandžak region, including taboos surrounding marriage, pregnancy, and domestic violence. It is highly successful, with over one million views of individual segments of the show.

*A1.net* has developed to become a media that is trusted by local audiences, and it has proven its dedication to independent reporting and democracy. It is now one of the leading voices for social change in Sandžak.

## LEBANON

### MANATEQ: PUTTING THE REGIONS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Founded in 2017 by a collective of independent reporters, *Manateq* is one of the few independent media outlets in Lebanon focusing on the south of the country, an area often overlooked by mainstream media. “We wanted to be the voice of the voiceless,” says Peter Obeid of Manateq, explaining that the media is particularly focused on women and the LGBT+ community.

*Manateq* has already built a following on its website and on Facebook, and now it is adapting its content to more digestible made-for-Instagram format to cater to a younger audience. “It’s a fine balance, expanding our audience without reducing the complexity of our work,” says Peter.

*Manateq* publishes long-form pieces rather than focusing on breaking news. Topics covered range from challenges faced by women entrepreneurs operating in a patriarchal society to the impact of Israeli attacks on Gaza and southern Lebanon, to the economy, to cultural articles about traditional crafts, poetry, literature, and cinema.

EED funding helped the media to institutionalise and to produce more in-depth content with a regional focus. “More importantly, EED challenged us to work on long-term strategies, capacity-building and organisational development. They did not just give us money, they showed interest in our growth,” says Peter.



“We wanted to be the voice of the voiceless”

- PETER OBEID



# Mariana Rață

**EED AT 10**

**MOLDOVA**



## **TV8: UNCOVERING CORRUPTION AND SPREADING THE TRUTH**

Since its launch in 2017, *TV8* has become one of the leading independent TV channels in Moldova and has consistently been rated among the most transparent and trustworthy TV channels in the country. *TV8*'s role is to inform society about the values of democracy and offer an alternative to Russian propaganda. It has been at the forefront of covering major events affecting Moldova's politics and society.

As Mariana Rață, senior editor at *TV8* explains: "People seek us out whenever something important happens in the country. As we're a young and dynamic team, we're able to adapt to needs quickly. For instance, we're one of the few independent TV stations that added more content in Russian following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine."

By producing original content in a transparent manner, *TV8* has positioned itself as an independent alternative to well-resourced Russia-aligned and oligarch-owned propaganda media in Moldova.





“Whatever someone’s opinions are, they should be expressed, because if they have any unacceptable ones, we can talk about them and change them”

- FISNIK ÇERKINI

# Fisnik Çerkini

## KOSOVO

### COOLNFRESH: CHANGING PEOPLE’S MENTALITIES ONE MEME AT A TIME

Fisnik Çerkini started *Coolnfresh* as a satirical Instagram account which posted memes to spark a discussion about corruption, sexism, and other sociopolitical issues. “We want to show people that you can laugh about any kind of issue while still caring for it.”

Four years later, after going viral during the Covid-19 lockdown, *Coolnfresh* now has 127,000 followers, and has become a point of reference for satirical commentary in Kosovo.

The outlet’s approach is to make fun of everyone across the political spectrum equally, an attitude that has earned *Coolnfresh* the trust and loyalty of its followers. *Coolnfresh* also doesn’t shy away from tackling controversial politically incorrect topics. “Whatever someone’s opinions are, they should be expressed, because if they have any unacceptable ones, we can talk about them and change them, instead of just sweeping them under the rug,” says Fisnik.



# Ramsey Tesdell

## EED AT 10

JORDAN

### SOWT: USING THE ARAB STORYTELLING TRADITION TO BREAK TABOOS

Ramsey Tesdell is the co-founder and executive director of the Arabic-language podcasting platform *Sowt* set up in 2016 at a time when podcasts were in their infancy in the Arabic-speaking world.

*Sowt* now produces over 25 shows that cover a range of topics, appealing to audiences across the Arabic-speaking world. The award-winning “Eib” podcast (Arabic for “shame”) was one of the early shows launched by *Sowt*. “It was one of the first shows to tackle gender and sexuality in Arabic head-on and without limits [...] It paved the way for others to tackle these topics,” says Ramsey.

He acknowledges that the media environment in the Middle East and the Gulf States has become more restrictive over the past decade. He believes that podcasts are an ideal medium in this environment, as unlike classical news reporting, they often go under the radar and allow for discussion of topics that are not covered in the mainstream media.

**“It was one of the first shows to tackle gender and sexuality in Arabic head-on and without limits [...] It paved the way for others to tackle these topics”**

**- RAMSEY TESDELL**



© Skeleton - Mohammad Hammoudeh



# III. CIVIC ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION

Civil engagement increases the ability of ordinary people to influence and monitor government actions and to influence the policies that affect their lives. EED provides flexible support to civic activists and organisations that is adapted to their local and changing needs.

Opportunities for citizens to play active roles in their societies vary across the regions where EED works, with those in more open democratic societies better empowered to seek accountability and transparency of local and national governments, to call out corruption, and to ensure that citizens' voices are heard in the political and legislative decisions that affect their lives. In more authoritarian and closed societies, the work of civil society organisations is more challenging, with legislation limiting or repressing their activities in many cases. In such contexts, civil society organisations need to find new ways to mobilise and to engage with society. EED's flexible support mechanisms are particularly important in these instances.

## EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023

Support to civic activists represents over one third of all funding provided by EED, with initiatives funded including grassroots organisations, nascent groups and individuals, as well as more established civil society organisations.

In this report, we provide a small sample of the many organisations supported by EED during 2023, including a Palestinian organisation in Nazareth, helping to breathe new life into the city; an organisation providing ways for Belarusians to protest against the regime despite mass repressions; a Gagauz organisation working with young people in Moldova; a Turkish CSO focused on environmental activism; and a peacebuilding and community development organisation for Syrian youth.

This part of the report also includes an **Environment Section** focused on the work of EED partners within the Western Balkans.



© Blebel

## BLEBEL

### A PALESTINIAN ORGANISATION BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO NAZARETH'S OLD TOWN

The brainchild of a group of young Palestinians, Blebel is revitalising the old town of Nazareth by moving into long-abandoned corners of the old market and slowly breathing new life into the area.

“We clear each area of rubble and clean it up, and as soon as it becomes vibrant and self-sustaining, we start again somewhere else,” says Rawi Awayed, a mainstay of the group. “We don’t want to end up as administrators or real estate investors.”

Blebel has grown organically into a registered organisation with around 120 volunteers who donate their time and skills to the renovation efforts. Much of the material needed for refurbishing is donated by local businesses.

“Our approach keeps us responsive to our community’s evolving needs,” says Rawi. The group now operates two spaces for musical activities and events and has attracted businesses and organisations to the old city, including new street stalls in the old bazaar. They have built up a community orchestra, hosting workshops to build a sense of belonging through a shared Arabic music culture.

They see restoration work and music workshops as a starting point to address deeply engrained cultural issues, social and economic rights. Women’s rights and empowerment are at the forefront of Blebel’s activities, and 12 women entrepreneurs have set up shop in the old town thanks to the group.

“Human rights is much too big of a word for a few people cleaning up an old market, but that is the direction we are heading,” says Bana, a graphic designer and Blebel member.



© Blebel



## BELARUS

### HONEST PEOPLE – ENABLING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE FOR BELARUSIANS

Honest People was founded in 2020 by a group of activists from the business, creative and IT sectors, with the vision of combining campaigning and technology platform solutions to bring about democratic change in Belarus. During the 2020 elections, the group created digital tools for election observation and to monitor electoral fraud by the regime.

Forced into exile following the regime’s harsh crackdown on the mass protests after these elections, Honest People continue to engage with in-country groups and individuals who can no longer operate openly due to the mass repression, but who oppose the war in Ukraine, militarisation and Russian influence over the Belarusian state, and Belarus’s role in this war.

The group has built a large community providing key information on corruption by the regime and infringements of human rights and this is used to inform targeted sanctions and reports.

“Our focus is to defeat Lukashenka’s propaganda. We provide information to young people, so that they can speak with their parents who watch state TV and believe state propaganda. We promote their critical thinking so that they can come to their own conclusions,” says Natallia Zhaburonak of Honest People.

Honest People develops creative projects to engage with citizens who cannot speak out publicly against the regime. They include: a civic education project informing university students about their rights; a project to help locals fight for better services in local communities; information and analysis about proposed legislation and draft laws that will affect people’s lives; and with upcoming elections in early 2024 in mind, a project to inform people on unofficial observation, protest and smart voting.



## MOLDOVA

### HELAL ORNEK: CREATING A WAVE OF ACTIVISM AMONG GAGAUZ YOUTH

Mihail Rusev, the executive director of Helal Ornek (Good Guys) believes in the young people of his homeland, Gagauzia, an autonomous republic in southern Moldova. Over the past eight years, Helal Ornek has developed a network of volunteers among school pupils and youth, who are involved in local leadership, cultural activities and community development. It has become an important alternative to Russian-led political volunteering and narratives.

The organisation’s work is planned bottom-up, with ideas emerging from the young people themselves. Via an EED-funded project, it now provides media literacy training in educational institutions.

“I can see a difference since we started our work. Young people are more open-minded, and they have more ideas. The local authorities are open to working with our group now and there are more projects and opportunities,” he says.

Mihail recognises the challenges of his region; most young Gagauzians emigrate to study or work abroad. He believes that some young people can be persuaded to stay. Helal Ornek provides career advice to school leavers, guiding them to careers where there are more opportunities at home, and information about state grants for young career professionals and potential entrepreneurs.





© Seferi Keçi



© Seferi Keçi

## TURKEY

### SEFERI KEÇİ: A COMMUNITY-LED ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIA OUTLET

Over the past few years, Aegean Turkey, a region in the west of the country with Izmir as its capital, has seen major construction projects, increasing mining and industrial activities, and more rural-urban migration, all of which have had a profound impact on the local environment.

Founded in 2017 by journalist Baha Okar, *Seferi Keçi* is a community-led media that is fostering environmental activism in the region, putting the topic on the agenda of local authorities and larger media outlets.

The journalists and activists regularly organise workshops on environmental issues with citizens and local politicians, and they run a café and cultural centre for social gatherings and movie screenings. They have a print magazine, as well as a website, social media, YouTube channel and podcasts.

Their small cooperative market supports local agriculture and generates income for the group's activities. EED's support has helped the group cover core costs, including salaries and office rent, and to increase the frequency of their activities and publications.

## EED Alumni Stories



### SYRIA

#### DOOR BEYOND WAR: BUILDING A FUTURE FOR THE YOUTH OF SYRIA

Karam Hilly took part in the Arab Spring protests in Syria in 2011 and was subsequently arrested. He lived for a period as an exile in Turkey. In 2015, he set up Sahem, an NGO empowering Syrian youth. An EED grant helped kickstart the initiative.

Sahem focused on youth empowerment and contributed to the establishment of youth voluntary groups in the north of Syria, Youth of Change. Eight years later, Door Beyond War—as Sahem was renamed—has helped dozens of Youth of Change groups to develop and play an active role in their communities. Over the years, in collaboration with local development committees, young people working with around 100 community-based organisations have implemented more than 75 initiatives.

“We want youth to contribute to decision-making in Syria in the future,” says Karam. “We need to build the power of the people, so they can advocate for change. We want young people to play an active role in dialogue with NGOs and donors, and to take a lead in projects that concern them and their future.”



© Door Beyond War



# Environmental Activism in the Western Balkans

Over the past decade, environmental movements have played an increasingly important role in the global activist landscape as climate change has become one of the most urgent challenges of our time.

Environmental challenges are particularly pressing in the Western Balkans, where green unspoilt mountain landscapes are in stark contrast to heavy levels of pollution, particularly in urban areas. This has deep consequences for the population, with an estimated 30,000 lives lost every year due to air pollution.

Small hydroelectric power plants (HPPs) construction is a significant issue in the region. While on paper, these appear a good alternative to outdated polluting coal plants, in practice HPPs have a devastating effect on local environments and on the lifestyle of rural communities and offer comparatively little benefit in terms of energy production.

Construction contracts are often given to foreign or shady domestic investors, with little transparency or consultation with local populations, making this a rule of law and democracy issue as much as an environmental one.

Across the Western Balkans, EED partners are supporting rural communities to fight against HPPs, river pollution, and other environmental damage. Their work provides a gateway to other types of activism, as working on environmental causes enables marginalised rural communities to make their voices heard and to play a role in decision-making processes of their regions and countries.

## ALBANIA

### GARD: PROTECTING RURAL LIFE FROM A HYDROELECTRIC POWER PLANT

Majlinda Hoxha is a native of Dibra, a rural region in northeast Albania famous for its natural beauty, where inhabitants live a centuries-old lifestyle.

There are few employment opportunities in Dibra, and most young and educated people leave to work in Tirana or abroad. Those who remain now see their rural way of life threatened by the Skavica dam project, where the construction of a hydroelectric plant would flood more than 30 villages in Dibra. Local residents were not consulted about this project, and the construction contract was awarded without open procurement and competition, fuelling rumours of corruption.

In 2021, Majlinda, together with other local activists, started campaigning to block the construction of the dam. She travelled to all the villages that would be affected by this construction to convince locals to advocate for their

rights, and to ensure their demands are put at the centre of decision-making by local and national authorities.

“Environmental protection and democracy are strictly connected. Most people in Dibra are against the construction of the dam, but they will not say it in public. They don’t see any alternatives to the government taking care of everything,” says Majlinda.

The Group of Rural Activists of Dibra (GARD) has been working hard to change this sense of powerlessness among the local population and to build a culture of activism. The Black Drin Association, part of the GARD group, and other environmental organisations have brought the case to the Constitutional Court, which last May agreed to review the Skavica dam project. “This is a reward for all the hard work of Dibra’s activists,” stated Majlinda in a recent interview with EED partner, *Citizens Channel*.



**“Environmental protection and democracy are strictly connected”**

**- MAJLINDA HOXHA**





© Polekol

## SERBIA

### POLEKOL: EMPOWERING LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST MOVEMENTS

Led by Iva Marković and Žaklina Živković, two experienced and well-connected activists with an unstoppable drive, Polekol – Organization for Political Ecology is a major driving force for environmental activism in Serbia.

The group works with local communities across the country, supporting them in their fight against environmental damage and pollution. Often these communities have little activist experience or knowledge and Polekol helps them build connections with other activist groups, develop their capacity and coordinate their activities, so that their voices are amplified and heard by local authorities.

“Many of these people have lost hope in democracy and the rule of law, but fighting for their nature, water, air, land is still important and logical to them,” says Žaklina.

Polekol’s “Pravo na vodu” (“Right to Water” initiative) is a network of activists protecting Serbia’s water assets against pollution, privatisation, and unsustainable exploitation, with the goal of including local communities in the decision-making processes. EED provided Polekol with core funding to coordinate this network, conduct street actions, social media campaigns and other advocacy actions, and provide legal support to activists.

In March 2023, Right to Water helped the residents of the village of Dadince obtain an important victory, halting the construction of a hydroelectric power plant on the Rupska river after a legal battle and a wave of protests and blockades by local citizens.





© Ecopatriotizam

## MONTENEGRO

### ECOPATRIOTIZAM: BUILDING A CULTURE OF RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN MONTENEGRO

Led by five women activists from Nikšić and Podgorica, Ecopatriotizam is an informal group providing practical solutions to environmental problems in Montenegro.

The activists began their work in 2021 by mapping illegal landfills, many located within national parks and local rivers. Today, they regularly mobilise volunteers for cleanup actions—one of their recent protests saw them cleaning up an area in Nikšić and dumping the rubbish bags in front of the local waste management authority.

The activists work closely with local authorities, holding them accountable for the environment, while also providing constructive criticism of their policies.

A female-led group in a male-dominated activist space, the Ecopatriotizam team believes in principles of ecofeminism and tries to apply these in every aspect of their personal and professional lives, outfitting their office with second-hand furniture and wearing thrifted clothes. They hope to transmit these values to a broader audience, and as part of this work they hold workshops to raise awareness of environmental issues in Montenegro.



© Ecopatriotizam

# Ibrahim Turak

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### PUSTI ME DA TEČEM: A RURAL VILLAGE PROTECTING THEIR VALLEY AND WAY OF LIFE

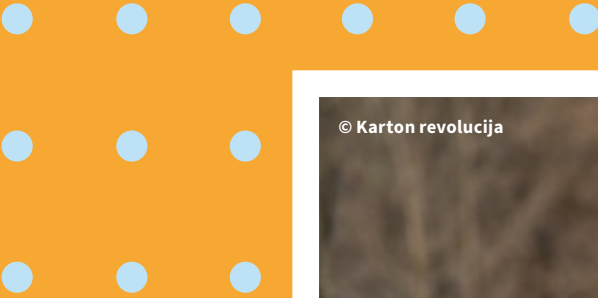
Ibrahim Turak, a former farmer, has been the president of Pusti Me Da Tečem since 2020, a local movement established to protect the Neretvica valley near the town of Konjic in Bosnia and Herzegovina from an illegal small hydro-electric plant construction project. The project would have had a disastrous effect on the valley's unique ecosystem and impacted local people's access to water.

Ibrahim, together with representatives from five local associations, organised a protest in the valley attended by 1,500 people which received national media attention. They then physically blocked construction trucks from entering the valley over a twenty-month period as they fought a legal case against the municipality.

In August 2021, the group's legal team successfully obtained a court ruling that the hydro-plant constructions were illegal. Thanks to their work with other activist organisations, a law was passed in July 2022 banning the new construction of small hydro-power plants in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. EED support contributed to the success of these advocacy efforts.



EED AT 10



# IV. HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND MONITORING

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of opinion, expression and of association are essential elements of democracy. EED supports human rights activists across the European Neighbourhood and beyond, who are defending human rights and raising citizens' awareness and understanding of these rights.

2023 marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets out universal rights and recognises the equal worth of every person embodying a common language of our shared humanity. Human dignity and the duty of care people owe each other as human beings is at the heart of this declaration. However, as stated by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, today, there is an increasing disconnect between standards of human rights and the reality on the ground, with a rise in racism, misogyny, inequality, populist politics and authoritarianism, a deluge of misinformation, and increasing conflict and violence.<sup>22</sup>

As EED partner, Nobel Prize winner and human rights defender Oleksandra Matviichuk has stated, "There can be no peace without human rights." In a world marked by increased conflicts and war, the work of human rights activists is more important than ever.

## EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023

EED support enables human rights defenders, lawyers, activists and campaigners to continue to fight for human rights, even in highly difficult circumstances. In this section, we include the profiles of human rights defenders supported by EED in Syria, Palestine, Georgia and Armenia as well as an incognito profile of an EED partner who works in a highly repressive context.

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22 OHCHR (2023) 'Human Rights 75 Initiative', accessed at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights-75>





## SYRIA

### **OBSALYTICS: USING OPEN DATA AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSERS IN SYRIA**

Obsalytics was founded in 2020 by a group of Syrians, including Karam Shaar, Wael Alalwani, and Muhannad Abu al-Husn, to shed light on the mechanics of the Syrian regime and its enablers through data. The team has developed a unique database of mostly open-source information on Syria's regime networks that helps investigate human rights violations inside the country.

The database has been widely used by stakeholders, including decision makers, to improve their understanding of Assad's regime and to improve the ways states and international institutions can support Syrian civil society and regular citizens without benefitting corrupt politicians.

Research conducted by the team in collaboration with the Syrian Legal Development Program showcased how human rights abusers and sanctioned individuals in Syria are benefitting from international contracts and aid flowing into their country.

This work has enabled the Obsalytics team to shed light on the way corruption works in Syria, where many businesses and private companies serve as a façade for government-linked operations, and the regime expects a cut from major corporations in exchange for access to different industries and public contracts.

**“We also aim to inform average Syrians about what’s really happening in the country. By exposing corruption, we can help people think for themselves and counter state propaganda”**

**- KARAM SHAAR**

The work of the Observatory of Political and Economic Networks, a subdivision of Obsalytics launched with EED support, helped uncover a shell company scheme set up by the Syrian regime to circumvent sanctions. Their investigation was published by *The Guardian* and resulted in individuals being sanctioned by the EU and the US.<sup>23</sup>

“Many foreign governments changed the way they work in Syria in light of the information we unveiled,” Karam says. “We also aim to inform average Syrians about what’s really happening in the country. By exposing corruption, we can help people think for themselves and counter state propaganda.”

<sup>23</sup> *The Guardian* (2022) 'Syria using maze of shell companies to avoid sanctions on Assad regime's elite'.



7amleh Documents Over 2.5 Million Instances of Violent Speech in Hebrew Against Palestinians on Social Media Platforms

© 7amleh



Procedural Guide to Palestinian Personal Data

Protection in the Digital Space

## EED Alumni Stories



### TAMLEH: ADVOCATING FOR PALESTINIAN DIGITAL RIGHTS

7amleh (pronounced “Hamleh” meaning “campaign” in Arabic), The Arab Centre for the Advancement of Social Media, advocates for Palestinian digital rights and educates people about these rights. Its mission is to create a fair, safe and free digital space for Palestinians. 7amleh carries out research and monitors Palestinian digital rights, helps to build knowledge and capacity among activists about digital safety, security and digital advocacy, and carries out advocacy campaigns for a change in policies and practices of governments, corporations and influential institutions.

During the latest war in Gaza and the escalation in violence in the West Bank and Israel, 7amleh have documented thousands of violations against Palestinian content, including censorship and restrictions on the use of digital platforms. Its team are actively calling for social media platforms to take action on tens of thousands of cases of hate speech and incitement to violence.

In 2021, EED provided 7amleh with a grant to create a new database: *7or: Observatory for Documentation of Palestinian Digital Rights Violations*, as a free platform to provide systematic monitoring of digital rights violations, and as a tool to inform social media companies. Any Palestinian can report a violation via the 7or platform, and the 7amleh team then follows up with social media companies to report these. Over the years, 7amleh has developed close relationships with these companies.

At that time too, Meta commissioned Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) to review the human rights impact of the company’s policies and practices during confrontations in Jerusalem the previous May, following a recommendation from the Oversight Board, and years of advocacy from 7amleh on this issue. 7amleh worked with BSR throughout the assessment process, with the final report finding that Meta’s policies had shown a bias against Palestinian and Arabic content and an under-enforcing of Hebrew language content.

7amleh has developed a hate-speech lexicon in Hebrew and Arabic, one of the recommendations of the BSR report, which it has made available to social media companies.



#### IV. Human Rights Activism and Monitoring

### ARMENIA

#### **YEZIDI CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: ENSURING A VOICE FOR THEIR PEOPLE**

The Yezidi Center for Human Rights (YCHR) is a group of activists, led by Muraz Shamoyan, that was created out of the watershed of the Sinjar genocide in 2014. The organisation's purpose is to draw attention to issues faced by the Yezidi minority, in particular youth and women, and to promote a better understanding of human rights within that community. Their activities cover three main areas: youth engagement, international human rights obligations and media work.

*Xirat Media* is an online platform, developed with EED support by the founders of YCHR, publishing high-quality content about the Yezidi community in two languages: Armenian—to raise knowledge about Yezidi issues, their life and culture with the Armenian majority, and Yezidi—to provide important information to the community in Armenia and beyond.

YCHR is playing a key role in helping to preserve the Yezidi language and identity by producing Yezidi language content.



© Yezidi Center for Human Rights





## GEORGIA

### GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION: ENSURING JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) is a human rights watchdog organisation with a long history. It was set up in Georgia shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Led by Nona Kurdovanidze, the organisation is the largest private legal aid provider in the country with over 20,000 beneficiaries annually. In a country where many mistrust state-funded legal aid, aid that is already highly limited, this is an essential service for marginalised communities where high levels of employment and rising prices mean that most people cannot access legal advice. GYLA gathers information on the issues faced by individuals and about their needs.

GYLA supports the development of the legal system in Georgia, holding the authorities accountable in the implementation of reforms, particularly within the judiciary. It monitors the implementation of priorities set out by the European Commission as part of Georgia's candidacy to the EU, and it keeps both Georgian and international partners informed on this process.

In early 2023, GYLA lawyers headed a legal working group assessing the proposed Transparency on Foreign Influence law, widely regarded as Kremlin-inspired legislation, that was later withdrawn following mass protests. They prepared a case to be sent to the European Court of Human Rights.





## INCOGNITO STORY

### **LIVES MATTER\*: PROTECTING CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS AND FIGHTING THE DEATH PENALTY**

More than two-thirds of countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice, however in some countries where EED works, the death penalty is a reality in both political and criminal cases.

Lives Matter has two main foci of its work. It carries out research on the death penalty and supports those in death row. It also lobbies and is building awareness in society about citizens' rights for political representation and during electoral processes. Its team of lawyers provides pro-bono legal assistance to politicians and activists who are targeted by the authorities due to their activism. Its social media and website have become one of the most important sources of information on human and civil rights in the country.

The organisation works closely with other human rights organisations both nationally and internationally and over the years, it has proved that even in the most repressive contexts, change is possible. Following Lives Matters' advocacy campaigns, many individuals have been released on bail or acquitted of all charges. Other "disappeared" individuals have resurfaced after similar campaigns.

Lives Matters works in a highly restrictive environment where its employees constantly risk physical and legal intimidation from the authorities, and the organisation constantly improves and adapts its security measures for staff and for the protection of sensitive data.

\* This partner's name has been changed to protect their identity.

# V. WOMEN'S CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women's empowerment and women and girls' ability to participate as equal citizens in political life and in society are essential elements of democracy. More than a third of EED's initiatives have a gender component, and women's engagement is a cross-cutting issue across EED's funding portfolio.

The processes of democratisation and women's rights movements tend to be closely intertwined. Women played central roles in the 2020 mass protests in Belarus, and in Iran in 2022, and they are among the most prominent leaders in civil society in Ukraine today as they build what one EED partner has referred to as "the new Ukraine".

## EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023

EED supports many women-led organisations, including those working on gender equality and women's rights, as well as those working on broader issues. Throughout this report, we profile organisations that are led by women who are committed to advance women's political and civic participation and leadership, and to defend and assist those in vulnerable and difficult circumstances. In this section of the report, we profile two organisations devoted to women's rights: one from Tunisia providing new opportunities to rural women, and one from Kosovo that is helping to develop a new generation of feminists.

In the **Women-led Initiatives in Ukraine** section of this report, we describe the work of civil society organisations and independent media partners in Ukraine headed by women leaders.







© Ladies First

## TUNISIA

### LADIES FIRST ASSOCIATION: BRINGING NEW HOPE TO WOMEN AGRICULTURAL WORKERS IN RURAL TUNISIA

The Sidi Bouzid governorate in central Tunisia is a poor agricultural region where many live in precarious economic situations. Women are a particularly vulnerable demographic, making up nearly two-thirds of all seasonal agricultural workers, working in hazardous conditions, underpaid and with limited access to social security.

The Ladies First Association is working to assist these women, providing services they need and helping them change their lives for the better.

Led by Hayet Kadri, the association's services range from breast checks to literacy classes, to awareness campaigns about domestic violence, to management and finance training for women artisans. An EED grant helped the association to set up an Observatory for Social and Economic Rights, to develop a monitoring, awareness raising and advocacy mechanism to protect local female workers of the region. The Observatory has carried out studies on the conditions of rural agricultural workers, and their findings are used by local government.

"This work has changed my life. I have a new vision and new hope, and this is reflected in my private life. I am not just an ordinary woman. I bring the energy from my work back to my family and my daughters are proud of me," says Hayet.



© Ladies First

**"I have a new vision and new hope, and this is reflected in my private life. I am not just an ordinary woman. I bring the energy from my work back to my family and my daughters are proud of me"**

**- HAYET KADRI**

## KOSOVO

### QIKA: RAISING A NEW GENERATION OF FEMINISTS

Created by award-winning journalist Leonida Molliqaj during the Covid-19 pandemic, Qendra për Informim, Kritikë dhe Aksion, (The Center for Information, Critique, and Action) or *QIKA* (“Girl” in Albanian) started out as an online website tackling gender inequality in Kosovo.

With a focus on youth, *QIKA*’s articles cover topics as diverse as unemployment and poverty to political participation and the right of women to their bodies. A recent development is the launch of “1≠1”, a unique open data platform with visual explainers on domestic violence against women.

*QIKA* has gathered a 70-strong group of volunteers, who contribute to the website, host events to discuss feminist topics, and conduct street actions. One of their biggest projects tackles menstrual poverty, with the distribution of free menstrual pads and tampons in schools, universities, and other public spaces, and an online petition to support the removal of VAT on menstrual items.

*QIKA* is bringing feminist issues closer to a conservative general public, and its activities are proving popular among young women. “I’m glad when we get positive feedback about our actions. We don’t do things just to get compliments: we want to provoke a bit, to rock the boat, to challenge perspectives and mindsets,” says Leonida.

**“We don’t do things just to get compliments: we want to provoke a bit, to rock the boat, to challenge perspectives and mindsets”**

**- LEONIDA MOLLIQAJ**

© Samir Karahoda









# VI. INCLUSIVE SOCIETY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

In many countries across the world, LGBT+ individuals, people from minority ethnic and religious groups, and people with disabilities face daily discrimination and exclusion and are restricted from exercising their democratic rights.

EED supports a wide range of organisations that raise awareness on LGBT+ and minority issues, empower communities and change mentalities and the environments in which they live. With rising nationalism and populism in many contexts, including in the Middle East, the Western Balkans and Russia, the LGBT+ community and other minorities face particular challenges, including increasing hate-speech, physical attacks and state-led discrimination and repression.

## EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023

In this section, we profile LGBT+ organisations from Kosovo, Turkey and Georgia, all of which are striving to build safer environments for their communities. In the **Women-led Initiatives in Ukraine** section of this report, we also profile organisations working with people with disabilities, an increasing minority group given the ongoing war.

“Participants were supposed to hide their faces, but I wanted my face to be seen and my voice to be heard”

- LEND MUSTAFA



## KOSOVO

### LEND MUSTAFA AND BUBBLE: BUILDING A SPACE FOR THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY

Lend Mustafa may be only in his mid-twenties, but he already has a decade of experience as an activist behind him. He became one of the faces of queer activism in Kosovo after publicly coming out as a transgender man at nineteen in a documentary. “Participants were supposed to hide their faces, but I wanted my face to be seen and my voice to be heard,” he says.

In April 2022, he opened a new space for the LGBT+ community, thanks to EED funding. At first glance indistinguishable from all other cafes and bars in Pristina, Bubble is a unique and much-needed safe space for the community to gather, organise, and socialise, with a lively weekly schedule of drag shows, poetry readings and fundraising events. The Bubble team also support transgender people by covering the costs of hormonal therapy.



© Samir Karahoda

Bubble is now a successful, self-sustainable social enterprise, although Lend admits there can be challenges balancing the needs of profit with those of the community. He is optimistic about the future of Kosovo’s queer community. “Kosovo is still behind in terms of LGBT+ rights, but things have vastly improved. The last time there was a major attack against the community was in 2012. Compared to back then, today Pristina has become San Francisco,” he says.

## TURKEY

### ÜNİKUIR: CREATING SAFE-HAVENS FOR TURKISH LGBT+ STUDENTS

Melike Balkan and Özgür Gür are founding members of ÜniKuir, promoting LGBT+ rights on university campuses in Turkey, where they have worked to set up LGBT+ university solidarity groups.



© ÜniKuir

ÜniKuir has faced many hardships along the way, including criminal proceedings and arrest, due to their role in the Pride March in Ankara and other LGBT+ events (these charges were later dismissed). Despite this, they have gone on to establish 36 university clubs and have more than 300 volunteers. They provide networking, counselling, visibility, capacity building and legal support to young LGBT+ people within universities. They also monitor LGBT+ rights in universities, political engagement of the queer community in decision-making mechanisms and violations of the right to organize and protest.

During the 2023 election period, the situation for the LGBT+ community deteriorated, with a hate campaign in the media and a campaign of harassment against LGBT+ people. It is now increasingly challenging for new university clubs to register, and some existing clubs have lost their status and LGBT+ students have lost the protection these clubs offered them. While previously ÜniKuir was focused on developing more university solidarity groups, today they are supporting those that remain active to keep operating. ÜniKuir is also playing an active role in fighting an amendment to the country’s referendum which would negatively affect LGBT+ families’ status within the legislation.

## INCOGNITO STORY

### **LOVE UNITES: CREATING A SAFE PLACE FOR THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY**

Love Unites is a feminist publishing house and community hub that provides a safe place for members of the LGBT+ community to meet and discuss their concerns without fear of moral judgement or more serious repercussions.

With EED funding, it is running book clubs with a focus on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) issues and human rights from a feminist perspective where participants can discuss their experiences and concerns. The publishing house publishes articles on sexuality and gender identity across collaborating platforms. The hub also provides psychotherapy through art for LGBT+ individuals. The team is documenting these activities on social media, while respecting the privacy of all participants concerned.

LGBT+ people face many challenges in this country, including the constant threat of arrest and stigmatisation from an increasingly conservative society. This community hub provides one of the few safe places for the LGBT+ community to meet and to take part in activities. Love Unites collaborates with another EED-funded organisation to provide for greater outreach into the community.





© Studio 64 - George Gogua



## EED AT 10

# Mariam Kvaratskhelia

### GEORGIA

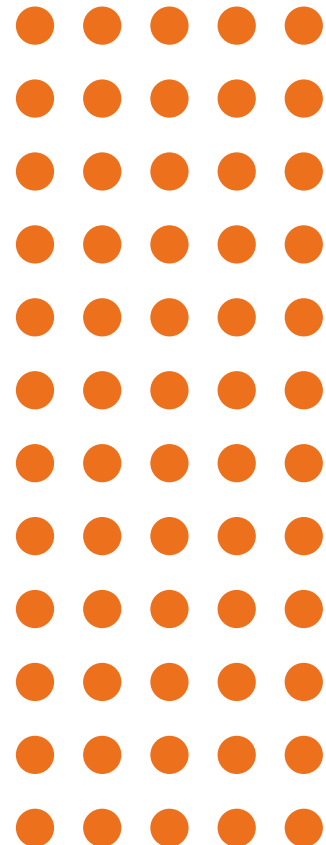
#### TBILISI PRIDE: PROUDLY ADVOCATING FOR LGBT+ RIGHTS

Mariam Kvaratskhelia took on the helm of Tbilisi Pride in 2021 after a decade of activism, her initial baptism of fire the events of 17 May 2013, when an LGBT+ group celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) was violently attacked by far-right protesters. Tbilisi Pride was set up in 2019 to organise the first ever Pride march in Georgia.

Ten years after the attacks, Mariam is proud of how far her country has come. “Even though the situation is challenging, I do have hope. [...] There is a shift in public attitudes compared to four or five years ago. Nowadays, 47 percent of Georgians believe that LGBT+ rights should be protected,” she says.

Tbilisi Pride has started a conversation about queer rights in Georgia. Its community of activists are at the forefront of all major demonstrations in the country. “Founding Tbilisi Pride took Georgian queer activism to another level: we are more political, we are a force that is listened to, and a group which has a seat at the table where decisions are made,” says Mariam.

However, despite Mariam’s optimism, LGBT+ people in Georgia continue to face many challenges. In 2023, thousands of far-right protesters violently attacked the Pride festival in Tbilisi and ransacked the offices of the march’s organisers, Tbilisi Pride and EED’s former partner, the Shame Movement. The police did little to intervene and Tbilisi Pride were forced to cancel the event.



# VII. ARTS AND CULTURE

**Arts and cultural activities can often provide an entry point into activism, enabling individuals to express ideas and promote democratic values in ways more effective and safer than traditional activism.**

EED supports a range of initiatives from the arts and culture, that promote freedom of speech and engage people in activism and in public life, including marginalised groups.

## **EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023**

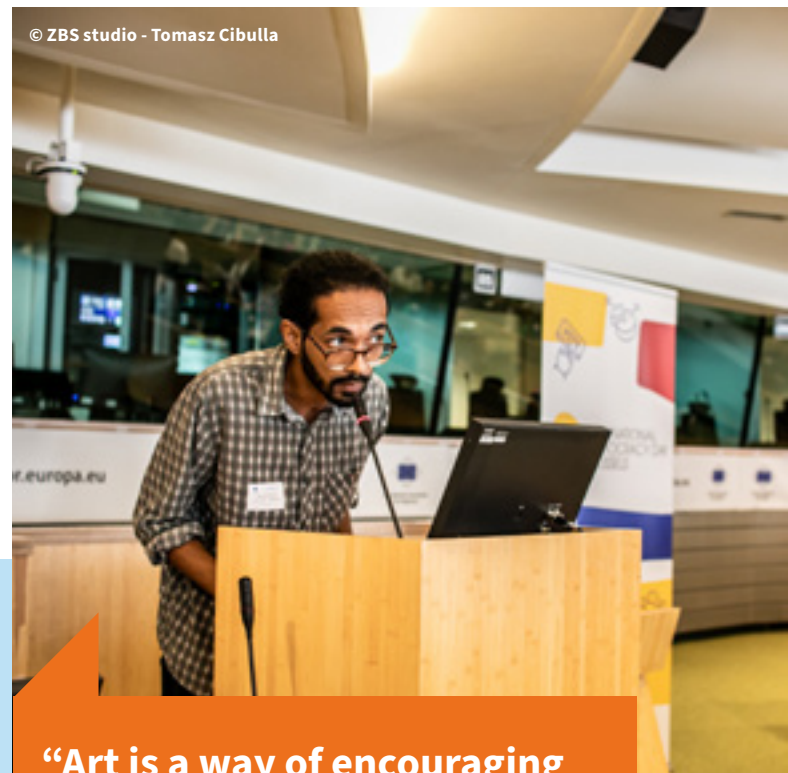
EED has assisted a range of cultural organisations and individuals during the year and throughout the past ten years, including cultural groups working with young people, such as a partner from Morocco that works with youth; an Armenian NGO focused on collective memory and memory activism; a digital encyclopaedia from Turkey; an organisation that uses music to build bridges in the troubled city of Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and an Armenian language publishing house, also in Turkey.

## **MOROCCO**

### **KOUNAKTIF – DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH ART AND CULTURE**

A collective of artists since 2018, the founders of KounAktif for Art and Culture came together with a vision of bringing culture and the arts to young people while promoting values such as freedom, justice and equality. With EED support, KounAktif has now created an Active Space, bringing together art, culture, ecology and technology as drivers for change in society. Young people and emerging artists can take part in the visual and sound arts, philosophy, new media and “Do-It-Yourself” practices in the space. The collective uses a participative and bottom-up approach to ensure that all activities respond to the needs of young people.

Youssef El Idrissi, a cultural engineer and executive director of KounAktif, sees art as an important vehicle to enable young people to express themselves.



© ZBS studio - Tomasz Cibulla

**“Art is a way of encouraging critical discourses and engaging young people as vectors of social change”**

**- YOUSSEF EL IDRISI**

“Art is a form of universal expression. Through art, an individual can express what is really inside them and they can open their minds to new ideas. Art is a way of encouraging critical discourses and engaging young people as vectors of social change,” he says.



**“They learn that it does not matter if you are a Muslim or a Serb. You can just be yourself”**

**- HILDA ĐOZIĆ**

## BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA

### HOUSE OF GOOD TONES: A SAFE SPACE FOR CHILDREN TO BECOME THEMSELVES

The House of Good Tones in Srebrenica provides hope for the next generation, in a town forever scarred by the cloud of genocide. Founded in 2011, its mission is to provide artistic, cultural, training and entertainment programmes for local children within a multi-ethnic environment. The House’s role is to teach the children to think for themselves and to provide an alternative to a nationalist and divisive discourse.

Many of the young people had never met anyone from the other ethnic group before coming to the House. “They play together, make music together and do projects together. They learn that it does not matter if you are a Muslim or a Serb. You can just be yourself,” says Hilda Đozić, the House’s office manager.

Over the years, over 2,000 children have passed through its doors and an EED grant has helped the House expand its mainly musically focused curriculum to include more civic activities.



## ARMENIA

### CULTURAL AND SOCIAL NARRATIVES LABORATORY: A CULTURE FOR DEMOCRACY

The Cultural and Social Narratives Laboratory (CSN Lab) is a think tank researching and revealing contemporary cultural and social issues in Armenia and supporting civil society within the country and the region. Its areas of interest include memory studies and activism, cultural rights, colonialism, gender studies and queer culture, urban and public spaces, and conflict transformation.

CSN Lab is making important contributions to Armenia’s policy and to public debate through regular appearances on different digital and traditional media platforms, including on EED partner Boon TV and online talk shows.

With the influx of Ukrainian and Russian migrants to Armenia, CSN Lab has begun covering migration as a research topic, and is now mapping migration patterns in the region. It is acting as a dialogue hub helping to build ties between Armenian civil society and the newly arrived migrants, providing a physical space where they can explore major social narratives and discuss topical issues and assisting their integration into Armenian society.

Following the arrival of 100,000 people displaced from Nagorno Karabakh, CSN expanded its programming to engage with this displaced population. The values and principles of democracy underpin CSN’s work, and provide a common ground for difficult discussions, such as the Soviet past and power relations between the capital and the regions.







Her genç kızın / gelin kızın rüyası (mı) dikiş makinesi?

Dikiş makinesi; bir dönem için çeyizlerin, evlerin tanıdık, anı ve anlam yüklü nesnesi. Kadınların ev içinde görünmeyen, tekstil atölyelerinde karşılığı verilmeyen emeğinin güçlü bir sembolü.

© Kültürhane and CDPR

## TURKEY

### CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY AND PEACE RESEARCH (CDPR) AND KÜLTÜRHANE: THE 100YEARS100OBJECTS ENCYCLOPAEDIA

The Centre for Democracy and Peace Research together with Kültürhane has developed a digital encyclopaedia to tell the 100-year history of the Republic of Turkey through 100 objects. The project responds to the increasingly repressive practices of the Turkish regime and the censorship of academics and journalists.

The encyclopaedia offers a unique alternative to the official discourse, providing comprehensive, independent and accessible information by experts, including academics, students and the wider public.

It sheds light on narratives ignored within the official historical discourse and voices that have gone unheard by addressing a century's-worth of history through 100 carefully chosen objects that evoke personal and collective memories and private and public history. EED's support has contributed to the creation of the encyclopaedia's interactive website,<sup>24</sup> which includes articles and podcasts.

© Kültürhane and CDPR



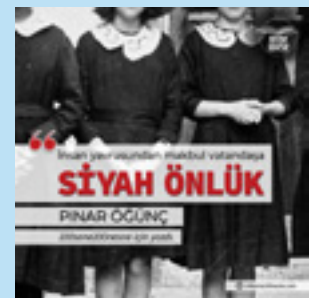
## Başörtüsü

8/100

28 Şubat



*Başörtüsü, 28 Şubat "postmodern darbe" sürecinin akla getirdiği ilk simgelerden. Bu dönemde başörtülü kadınlar üniversiteye alınmada, kamuda çalışanlar mesleklerinden men edildi. Bu yasak, bir mücadele alanını da beraberinde getirdi.*



24 See: <https://100sene100nesne.com/>

# Lora Sari

TURKEY

EED AT 10

© Fayn Studio



## ARAS: BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN TURKISH AND ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES THROUGH LITERATURE

“Literature is the voice of the unheard [...] And literature is a tool to claim a space for our true self rather than the self created by a racial stigma or a myth,” says Lora Sari of Aras, the only bilingual Turkish-Armenian publishing house in the world.

In a socio-political context where freedom of expression is increasingly limited, nationalism is on the rise, and the space for both activists and minorities is shrinking, Aras is carving a much-needed niche for Armenian literature, culture and cross-cultural dialogue in Turkey. Aras has also established the Yesayan Salon, a unique cultural centre in Istanbul that hosts events related to culture and democracy.

“Cultural activities remind you how people are normalising authoritarian regimes, and that you have to try to reverse this situation. It may be a cliché, but literature reminds you that courage is contagious,” says Lora.

**“It may be a cliché,  
but literature  
reminds you  
that courage is  
contagious”**

**- LORA SARI**

# VIII. YOUTH

**Young people are the future. Yet at a time when many young people feel disillusioned by politics and political leaders and where misinformation and disinformation are rife, it is vital to engage them in the civic life of their countries. That way, they can become informed and active citizens.**

When young people take part in civic activism, it provides them with new skills, opportunities and networks for future personal and professional growth. They can become empowered citizens with the ability to change the status quo for the better and to bring about more democratic societies.

## **EED ADDED VALUE IN 2023**

Youth is a cross-cutting issue across many EED initiatives, with many founded or led by young people. As a flexible democracy support organisation, EED can fund unregistered or new organisations without a track record, which would not be able to access funding from other donors. In this section, we profile a youth group from Albania reviving the cultural and civic life of their city, an organisation in North Macedonia improving the lives of university students, a radio station from Palestine, and a youth club in Georgia, as well as a former EED partner from Tunisia.





## ALBANIA

### GROUP ATA: REVIVING CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND YOUTH ACTIVISM IN THE CITY OF KAMËZ

Kamëz is the fifth largest city in Albania, but it does not have any public and cultural spaces like theatres, cinema or libraries. Young people see little future for themselves in the city.

“I attended my first theatre performance when I was 22 years old,” says Kamëz native Diana Malaj. “We were excluded from any kind of intellectual or cultural life here.”

Diana is one of the founders of Group ATA (“They” in Albanian), which was created in 2014 by local youths to revive the cultural and civic life in Kamëz. Over the past decade, Group ATA has hosted cultural events and encouraged young people in their community to produce their own artistic output, from theatre plays to online community media and podcasts.

Group ATA is also working to hold the local authorities accountable. They follow local council meetings, initiate petitions, and launch strategic litigations for civil rights violations.

“We tried to give another language to this stigmatised city and to this stigmatised people. Now we want to leave our legacy to future generations, hoping that they will continue this tradition of local grass-root activism to improve life in our city,” says Diana.

© Group ATA







**“Now we want to leave our legacy to future generations, hoping that they will continue this tradition of local, grassroots activism to improve life in our city”**

**- DIANA MALAJ**





## NORTH MACEDONIA

### FORUM FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: YOUNG PEOPLE LEADING EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIETAL REFORM IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Blendi Hodai is the founder and executive director of the Forum for Educational Change (FECH), a grassroots civil society organisation established in 2021 with the aim of improving the quality of higher education and empowering university students in North Macedonia.

Through FECH, Blendi is now addressing what he views as the most pressing challenges facing the higher educational sector, advocating for the digitalisation of universities, for a raise in the value of meal vouchers to take account

for inflation, and combatting corruption in academia by campaigning for new measures against plagiarism in university faculties.

As part of its EED grant, FECH has opened a youth centre in Tetova, a city with 18,000 students, where young people can meet, hold workshops, roundtables, show movies, host discussions and run activist related activities for students. This is one of the few places in the city where students can gather.

## GEORGIA

### EUROCLUB KVARELI: FOSTERING YOUTH ACTIVISM IN EASTERN GEORGIA

When Nika Gurini moved back to his hometown of Kvareli in eastern Georgia following university studies in Tbilisi, he noticed that there was no cultural and civic life for local youth. Convinced he could improve this situation, he asked his former school principal if he could use a classroom for activities. This was the beginning of EuroClub Kvareli, which four years later has become the main hub for young people in the city.

EuroClub organises workshops, lectures, movie screenings and democracy-related activities on human rights, gender issues, environmental challenges and other topics, often inviting public figures to travel from the

capital to meet local youth in Kvareli. It provides the office space for free to other civil society organisations.

EuroClub’s work has not been without challenges. In early 2023, a far-right group organised a protest, blocking access to Kvareli’s building and verbally abusing the academic due to deliver a lecture.

Nika believes the organisation has already had a profound effect on the community, and that it is helping to build a culture of activism in the region. “If someone visits Kvareli now, they can see the outcome of our work. People feel more European, more like a community, and they feel like they can protest to change things if needed,” he says.

**“They feel like they can protest to change things if needed”**

**- NIKA GURINI**







**“When the media writes about Palestine, it’s always bad news. We wanted to celebrate the success of Palestinians who are presidents, vice presidents, doctors, actors”**

**- MIRNA ALATRASH**

## PALESTINE

### RADIO BALADNA: BUILDING A CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY AMONG YOUNG PALESTINIANS

Mirna Alatrash and Aladdin Alabid are a young couple from Bethlehem - she a Christian, he a Muslim - who challenge stereotypes in their work and life. As the founders of *Baladna Media Network*, they are trying to build a dialogue between the local community and decision-makers. Their radio station, *Radio Baladna*, has an audience of Palestinians from all over the world.

“When the media writes about Palestine, it’s always bad news. We wanted to celebrate the success of Palestinians who are presidents, vice presidents, doctors, actors,” says Mirna.

*Baladna* encourages the development of a culture of democracy among young Palestinians through both their media network and in-person activities. They want young people to be more aware of their rights, and they encourage them to participate in the electoral process, and to demand accountability and transparency from local authorities. “It’s about putting young people and women at the centre as the change-makers,” explains Aladdin.

Their work is not without challenges. The West Bank is constantly subject to freedom of movement restrictions and outbreaks of violence, which have escalated in recent months. Palestinian narratives are frequently blocked from social media platforms, as has been documented in the case of Meta.<sup>25</sup>

The current war in Gaza has made *Baladna’s* work far more difficult. It is hugely challenging to communicate the Palestinian reality to the rest of the world, as its journalists are working in an atmosphere of increased censorship and fear. “Palestinian journalists are being arrested for social media posts. Our team members are scared about the future, and about their safety the safety of our fellow journalists,” says Aladdin.

He believes that the biggest task ahead is to help restore Palestinian public confidence in the international community, which they perceive as falling short of its responsibilities and of abandoning Palestinian journalists and civilians.

25 BSR (2022) ‘Human Right Due Diligence of Meta’s Impacts in Israel and Palestine in May 2021: Insights and Recommendations’, September 2022, accessed at: [https://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR\\_Meta\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Israel\\_Palestine\\_English.pdf](https://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_Meta_Human_Rights_Israel_Palestine_English.pdf)

## EED AT 10



© Gray Pictures - Mohamed Zarrouki

# Fadwa Zidi

## TUNISIA

### **MUNATHARA: GIVING A VOICE TO WOMEN, YOUTH, AND MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES**

Since EED provided core funding to this still nascent organisation in 2014, the Munathara Initiative from Tunisia has become a popular online debate forum which highlights underrepresented voices in the Arab public sphere by creating opportunities for women, youth and marginalised communities to engage in debate and address societal issues.

“We want to present alternative views and beliefs, and to teach the youth and new generations the art of debating and accepting differences without resorting to conflict or letting our beliefs harm us,” says Fadwa Zidi, chief operating officer and executive producer.

Munathara organises media skills workshops and online debate competitions where politicians and opinion leaders engage with participants in live-broadcasted television debates. The results of these debates are presented to policy decision-makers and other stakeholders.

“We try to encourage debate while facilitating citizen participation in dialogues that have an impact on decision-making processes. I think there are significant challenges in the Arab world, and we acknowledge and confront them.” says Fadwa.

# WOMEN-LED INITIATIVES IN UKRAINE

## Ukrainian women take the lead in civil society and independent media amid Russia's full-scale invasion.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, millions of women have self-mobilised across the country, providing help to those forced to flee their homes due to hostilities, availing of their vast networks to lead humanitarian relief work, taking up cameras to document the brutalities of war, joining Ukrainian defence forces and providing vital non-combat logistics and support to the army.

### WOMEN AT THE CENTRE OF CIVIL SOCIETY'S RESPONSE TO THE FULL-SCALE WAR

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion, women have emerged as civil society leaders in greater numbers. Women leaders are heading civil society organisations and independent media outlets, which include many EED partners. Women represent the majority of the highly educated and skilled workforce in Ukraine, and they are well positioned to drive Ukraine's reform agenda, strengthen anti-corruption measures, and push for transparency and accountability in political processes. They are determined to play a central role in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction.

As is the case in all military conflicts, women and girls are particularly affected by this ongoing war. There have been multiple reports of sexual violence and rape, and females make up the majority of over six million Ukrainian refugees still living outside the country. But Ukraine's women are determined not to be viewed as victims of this war—instead, they want to play central roles in what Nobel Peace prize laureate and former EED grantee, Oleksandra Matviichuk, refers to as “winning the peace” or building Ukraine's democratic future.

This centrality of Ukraine's women is recognised in Ukraine's WPS National Action Plan based on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security that states that women must be engaged in “every step of the reconstruction process”, given their active role in the emergency response, peacebuilding, mediation and in monitoring the human rights situation in the country.

### MAJORITY OF GRANTS OF GRANTS TO WOMEN-LED ORGANISATIONS

EED supports multiple women-led initiatives across Ukraine, many in vulnerable areas that were temporarily occupied or remain close to the frontlines. Nearly 57 percent of all grants awarded by EED in 2023 in Ukraine went to organisations led by women.

EED's grantees include long-established entities such as: the **Center for Civil Liberties**, led by Oleksandra Matviichuk and founded in 2007, now investigating and documenting Russia's war crimes; the grassroots organisation **Zahyst** in Chernivtsi working for a more inclusive society for over 12 years; **Dobrochyn Centre** in Chernihiv, which has built a cadre of changemaker youth leaders over the past two decades; **Vilne Radio**, which began broadcasting out of Bakhmut in 2017; **Pershyy Kryvorizkyi**, a media platform in Kryvyi Rih that has been operating for 13 years; the **Media Initiative for Human Rights**, led by Olga Reshetylova; and the **Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement**, which provides vital support to female veterans as they return to civilian life.

EED has also provided initial grants to establish or help support nascent organisations, such as **The Kyiv Independent**, established in December 2021 (and supported by EED immediately after), just weeks before the full-scale war, and today one of the leading and most trusted Ukrainian voices with a global audience ensuring a climate of transparency and accountability; **Smilyvy Irpin**, a grassroots project empowering its community to play an active role in recovery processes; **Human Rights Centre Pryncyp**, which is defending the rights of Ukrainian veterans; and **Eco Misto Chernihiv**, a vibrant environmental protection initiative.



EED AT 10

# Oleksandra Matviichuk

## UKRAINE

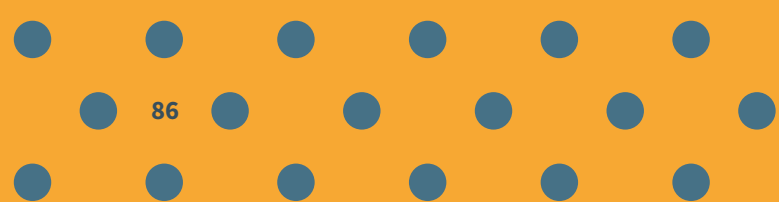
### OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK AND THE CENTER FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES: DOCUMENTING RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES IN UKRAINE

Lawyer and civil society activist Oleksandra Matviichuk launched the Center for Civil Liberties (CCL) in 2007. In 2014, CCL began to document Russia’s war crimes in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. One of the very first grants awarded by EED in Ukraine allowed CCL to coordinate EuroMaidanSOS, a grassroots initiative demanding justice following the crackdown on peaceful protesters by the Ukrainian authorities in November 2013.

With the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Oleksandra and CCL joined the rest of the country in an exceptional volunteer effort. “Ordinary people started to do extraordinary things. [...] Millions contributed to the resistance,” she says.

CCL is now documenting Russia’s war crimes in the occupied territories, building an archive of evidence to hold perpetrators accountable. Its tireless work was internationally recognised when Oleksandra received the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the Center in 2022.

“The International Criminal Court is investigating these crimes against humanity, but 98 percent of cases rely on Ukraine’s national legal system which already faced challenges even before the war. There are currently nearly 100,000 criminal proceedings open in Ukraine with the Prosecutor General. It’s a huge challenge to provide justice to all victims of war, but we must give the chance of justice to every individual. Human lives matter,” she says.



## OLGA RUDENKO AND DARYNA SHEVCHENKO

### THE KYIV INDEPENDENT

Led by Olga Rudenko as chief editor, and Daryna Shevchenko as CEO, *The Kyiv Independent* was established just weeks prior to Russia's full-scale war thanks in part to an EED grant and a crowdfunding campaign. Today it is the leading English-language reporter and commentator on the war, reaching millions of daily readers across the globe. One of the outlet's articles was cited by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, when she addressed the European Parliament in the initial days of the war. Today, the media is continuing to ensure independent coverage of events, despite the challenges of wartime reporting.

"As journalists we risk our lives daily, and we also face challenges on how we report things, particularly aspects not complimentary to our country, such as corruption. But we believe it is essential to shed light on what is happening. It is more democratic to talk about these things than to remain silent," says Olga Rudenko.

**"As journalists we risk our lives daily, and we also face challenges on how we report things, particularly aspects not complimentary to our country, such as corruption. But we believe it is essential to shed the light on what is happening. It is more democratic to talk about these things than to remain silent"**

**- OLGA RUDENKO**

**"Living barrier-free affects the quality of life and the dignity of each and every one of us"**

**- MARIIA NIKITINA**

## MARIIA NIKITINA

### ZAHYST

Over the past 12 years, Zahyst (or Protection), a grassroots initiative in Chernivtsi in south-west Ukraine, has worked to build more inclusive and democratic communities and to cultivate acceptance among society of disability and diversity. Led by Mariia Nikitina, herself a wheelchair user, Zahyst transformed its activities during the initial days of the war, responding to the urgent needs of internally displaced people, including those with disabilities.

Today, as more veterans with disabilities return home and face accessibility challenges in their daily lives, Zahyst is implementing an EED funded project: Activists in Inclusive Communities. It is collaborating with educational institutions, local authorities and citizens with the aim of transforming local communities to bring about a more inclusive society.

"The topic of building an inclusive and barrier-free society has always been relevant and important. During the full-scale invasion, this has become even more urgent due to the increase in the number of people with disabilities due to the hostilities. Living barrier-free affects the quality of life and the dignity of each and every one of us," says Mariia.

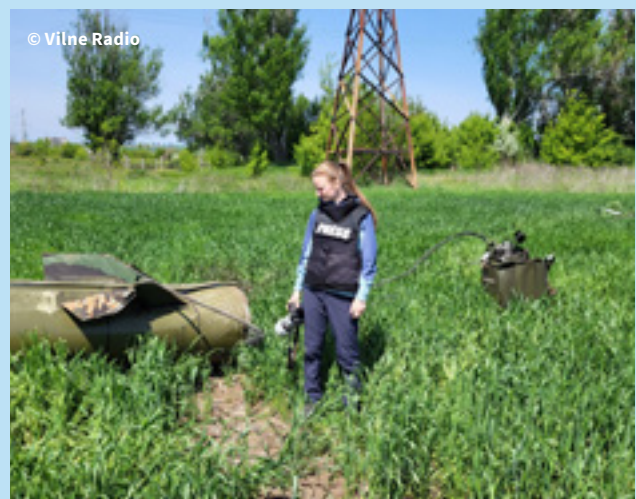
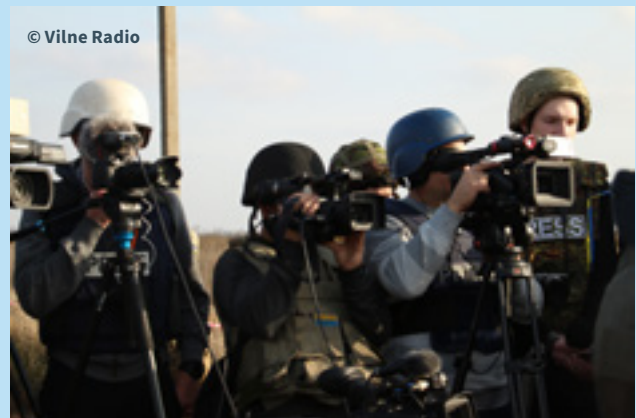


## ANASTASIIA SHYBIKO

### VILNE RADIO

Since 2017, Anastasiia Shybiko, director and co-founder of *Vilne Radio*, has covered local news and reported on the lives of residents and the security and social issues they face in Donbas in Eastern Ukraine. The station was one of the few sources of independent information for the people of this region, broadcasting on both FM and online.

Formerly based in Bakhmut, just 25 kilometres from the frontlines, the *Vilne Radio* team was forced to relocate in February 2022 when the region became the centre of military hostilities. Anastasiia and her team have continued to travel to frontline areas to ensure locally sourced information. Today, *Vilne Radio*'s team members are broadcasting from various locations across Ukraine and the outlet remains a crucial source of information for residents in the wider Donetsk region.





## SOFIIA SKYBA

### PERSHYI KRYVORIZKYI

For over 13 years, the *Pershyi Kryvorizkyi Information Agency* has reported on events and run investigations on public spending and governance in Kryvyi Rih, an important industrial city in the Dnipro region, and native city of Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky. Its journalists rely on the public information law and use open data platforms to monitor public procurement and to inform their readers on how taxes were spent by the local government.

The onset of the full-scale war was a difficult period for the media outlet. Kryvyi Rih is just a two-hour drive from territories illegally occupied by Russia since 2022. *Pershyi Kryvorizkyi's* founder joined the defence forces and its revenue model collapsed—previously they had a sustainable business model with advertising from local businesses.

Today the media is thriving. Led by editor-in-chief Sofiia Skyba, it has expanded its coverage to different regions of Ukraine, and it is producing more human-driven stories about the war, and on environmental problems and social transformations. “In the last year and a half, we have tripled our readership. We now have around 400,000 readers per month, and our data shows that people spend a lot of time on our website and find us important for them. Journalists in nearby cities also use our materials as a reference,” says Sofiia.



**“Journalists in nearby cities also use our materials as a reference”**

**- SOFIIA SKYBA**

## OLGA RESHETYLOVA

### THE MEDIA INITIATIVE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Led by Olga Reshetylova, a former journalist, the *Media Initiative for Human Rights* is a high-profile human rights organisation that monitors human rights violations and exposes war crimes to domestic and international audiences. A member of the Ukraine 5am Coalition of human rights organisations collecting and documenting war crimes committed by Russian armed forces in Ukraine, it conducts investigations into the individuals responsible for these crimes, and liaises with officials at home and abroad, including law enforcement agencies.

There are an estimated 20,000 Ukrainians held as prisoners of war or civilian hostages in Russia. Some 40 percent of these are civilians, including many children. Central to the organisation’s work is the development of legal frameworks and mechanisms for their release. It also raises awareness among stakeholders about locating these individuals, ensuring their well-being and about initiating proceedings by the International Criminal Court to address Russian military involvement in taking civilian hostages.



Many of the team’s members are personally affected by the war, with loved ones held in Russian captivity or living in the occupied territories. They systematically analyse and document Russian war crimes, advocate for prisoners’ releases, conduct media campaigns, and take part in international advocacy trips and events.

## NATALIYA DROZD

### DOBROCHYN CENTER

The Dobrochyn Center works with young people in the Chernihiv region bordering Russia and Belarus, helping to empower them to become local changemakers within their communities. During the spring of 2022, much of the region was under Russian occupation, with locals disconnected from the rest of the world and living in constant fear for their lives. Today, these local communities, including youth-led initiatives launched by Dobrochyn, are engaged in rebuilding and working on projects to help the most vulnerable citizens.

“These young people chose to stay in their home region after the occupation,” Nataliya says. “They believe in what they are doing. Local civil society and government know that it is vital to engage with young people. They understand that this is an integral part of ensuring they continue to live in our region and to ensure that we are not occupied again.”



**“They understand that this is an integral part of ensuring they continue to live in our region and to ensure that we are not occupied again”**

**- NATALIYA DROZD**

## MYKHAILYNA SKORYK

### SMILYVY IRPIN

A former deputy mayor of Bucha, a residential suburb close to Kyiv, and founder of Smilyvy Irpin, Mykhailyna Skoryk has been fighting illegal construction in her community for years and encouraging residents to take an active interest in local development. Today, after Russia’s brutal occupation of Irpin in March 2022, over 50 percent of the buildings have been damaged, and nearly 18 percent destroyed.

Smilyvy Irpin is a grassroots organisation bringing together activists to monitor decision-making of the local authorities, ensure transparency in construction, raise awareness among community members about the local self-government’s decisions impacting their daily lives, and help contribute to sustainable rebuilding and long-term community development plans. The organisation partners with other local civil society actors, housing cooperatives and the private sector and it is working to foster local leaders capable of taking responsibility to protect their own environments.

“As civil society, we can be agents of transparent reconstruction at the local level. This is a moment to rethink Ukraine, rethink how we do recovery and how we deal with the problems we are facing today,” says Mykhailyna.

**“As civil society, we can be agents of transparent reconstruction at the local level”**

**- MYKHAILYNA SKORYK**



## KATERYNA PRYIMAK

### UKRAINIAN WOMEN VETERAN MOVEMENT

Since 2014, after the Revolution of Dignity, the Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement has played a leading role in promoting awareness and advocating for women veterans' issues. Set up by Andriana Susak-Arekhta, the movement has a history of advocating on behalf of women soldiers and veterans to improve Ukraine's legislation and to help build a resilient community of female veterans engaged in democratic activism. In 2022, Kateryna Pryimak took over as head of the organisation, when Andriana suffered a life-altering injury due to a landmine. Since then, the importance of the NGO's work has only intensified.

Although an estimated 40,000 women serve in the defence forces, the state has been slow to provide women with adequate conditions of services both legally and practically. Post-war, there could be more than 1.5 million veterans in Ukraine, yet there are currently limited resources available for veterans' medical and psychological rehabilitation. Veterans and their families are un-informed about their rights. The team is working with women veterans and their families to assist them and to foster women's leadership and empowerment as agents of change in the society.

"We are convinced that women can help bring about long-term peace. In the context of military service, the support of women helps to change approaches to service, to ensure professionalism instead of stereotypes, better technology instead of outdated tools, and focuses the army on human rights and the mechanisms for realising these rights [...] It is important for us to support female veterans and to unite women around our military experience," says Kateryna.



© Ukrainian Women Veteran Movement







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## LIUBOV HALAN

### PRYNCYP

Led by Liubov Halan, Human Rights Centre Pryncyp is championing institutional changes to ensure veterans receive the services guaranteed to them by law. The NGO works with veterans and their families in navigating the complex bureaucratic procedures and fighting for these rights.

Pryncyp was founded by Masi Nayyem, a lawyer who lost an eye in 2022 while serving in the defence forces, and who experienced first-hand the challenges of transitioning back to civilian life. With EED start-up funding, Pryncyp has launched a rights navigator—a

self-help instrument for former soldiers and their families to navigate the law and civilian life. The organisation works with a network of other partners in the field, providing veterans with the necessary training and assisting them in their search for accessible jobs.

“There is great political will and there is strong initiative from various stakeholders to address the issues we are raising. Our advocacy work will be decisive in the context of Ukraine’s veterans’ policies in the years to come,” says Liubov.



## OLYA RYS

### VELOKUHNIA / ECO MISTO

Eco Misto is well-known in the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv for its advocacy campaigns aimed at creating cycling infrastructure, protecting green zones, and engaging youth and children in eco-activities. In the spring of 2022, when the city was under siege and there was little electricity and no access to public transport, Eco Misto's team shifted its focus to humanitarian relief, distributing aid to residents by bicycle.

Today, it is estimated that 90 to 95 percent of urban air pollution in Ukraine is caused by road transport, particularly in cities like Chernihiv. It is essential to develop more environmental forms of public transport and micro-mobility, and to engage communities in the development and implementation of this process to ensure transparency of decision making.

EED provided Eco Misto's new social enterprise Velokuhnia with start-up funding to help the team foster a community of environmentally conscious individuals. Together they are working to improve the city infrastructure and to promote people-friendly urban planning as the city rebuilds after the Russian siege. The team is increasing awareness among the community about ecological transport and the need for a new cycling infrastructure strategy and is pushing for more community involvement in the development of sustainable mobility in the city of Chernihiv.



# CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES: THE TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

**In emergency situations, civil society is often the best placed to quickly adapt to emerging needs. It has the skills and networks in place to quickly organise and to mobilise resources, to work closely with local communities and when appropriate, with local authorities.**

Civil society organisations can complement traditional humanitarian relief programmes, as they have track records within their societies and are trusted by citizens.

In these situations, local independent media also play a key role, providing on-the-ground timely coverage from what are often chaotic situations during natural or manmade disasters, informing affected people about the evolving situation, and holding local, national and international institutions accountable for their response.

In 2022, following the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine, civil society played a central role in providing relief to regions affected by the war, supplying food, essentials and accommodation to displaced people, and helping people escape to safer areas.

In 2023, civil society and independent media responded to citizens' needs and made sure that their voices were heard following the earthquake in Turkey and Syria in February, in Morocco in September, and during the devastating flooding when two dams collapsed in Derna, in Libya. Similarly, in Armenia, EED partners were central in coordinating assistance to the over 100,000 people displaced from Nagorno Karabakh over a matter of days.

## **EED'S ADDED VALUE**

Unfortunately, many of the contexts where EED works are marred by corruption, poor planning and incompetent public administrations. In emergency situations, this means that civil society and independent media are central in ensuring that affected citizens can access the assistance they need in a timely and efficient fashion. As climate change causes more environmental disasters worldwide, it is likely that emergency response work will increasingly become an important part of civil society organisations' work.

While EED's mandate is that of a democracy-support organisation, its flexible, demand-driven model means that it is well-placed to quickly respond when situations change. In Ukraine in 2022, EED was able to provide its first funding within 24 hours of the full-scale war and provided a grant a day over the first 60 days of the war. Following the earthquake in Syria and Turkey, the EED Executive Committee approved an Emergency Response to provide additional resources to current and former grantees, and to relevant pro-democracy actors who had not previously received EED support. This enabled partners to quickly adapt to different emergency needs, and EED ensured a rapid turnaround in grant requests.

This section gives a snapshot of this work, highlighting the important contributions by EED partners in Turkey and Syria following the devastating earthquake in this region.





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## TURKEY

### FAYN: REPORTING FROM THE GROUND TO COUNTER MISINFORMATION AND HOLD AUTHORITIES ACCOUNTABLE

One of the fastest-growing independent media in Turkey, *Fayn* focuses on in-depth coverage and on constructive journalism, suggesting solutions to collective problems.

Şükrü Oktay Kılıç, Managing Director and founder of *Fayn*, was one of the many reporters who travelled through strenuous conditions to report on the earthquake, arriving near the epicentre only three days after the disaster. “The main challenge as a journalist is to protect yourself from being traumatised by what you see, and to not let emotions get ahead of professionalism,” he says.

After the earthquake, an important part of *Fayn*’s work was to counter disinformation and hate speech that was spreading on Turkish media, most of it directed at Syrian refugees.

Its journalists challenged the narratives on the earthquake presented by mainstream media outlets and government agencies. “They said it was a natural disaster, when actually most deaths would have been prevented if the buildings had been constructed according to earthquake building codes,” explains Oktay.

Throughout 2023, *Fayn* journalists continued to travel to the region regularly, producing follow-up stories on the aftermath of the earthquakes. At a time when media attention in Turkey has now shifted to other topics, they plan to continue working with a growing group of journalists from the region.

“Independent media outlets produce useful stories for the people affected by the disasters, hold those who neglect their responsibilities to account, and push them to take serious steps so that this never happens again,” says Oktay.



## TURKEY

### **BOTAN INTERNATIONAL: HELPING JOURNALISTS AFFECTED BY THE EARTHQUAKE IN DIYARBAKIR**

Headquartered in Diyarbakır, Botan International is the only organisation that provides media training in the Kurdish language in Turkey. *Botantimes.com* is the most widely read Kurdish language website in Turkey.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the Botan team worked on providing coverage about the disaster as well as material support to the community. “We all donated 20 percent of our salaries to the humanitarian relief efforts and when it was difficult to find food in Diyarbakır, we cooked and served meals for journalists,” says founder and CEO Murat Bayram.

They also provided cameras—some bought thanks to EED funding—to journalists whose equipment was destroyed by the earthquake and lent their office space to other media outlets.

Today, they have started providing psychological support for reporters affected by the disaster. “During the emergency, we as journalists prefer to concentrate on reporting. This doesn’t mean we overcome traumas easily—we just postpone dealing with them,” says Murat.





**“During the emergency, we as journalists prefer to concentrate on reporting. This doesn’t mean we overcome traumas easily—we just postpone dealing with them”**

**- MURAT BAYRAM**







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**“You have the right to ask for food and shelter, but also the right to ask for democracy”**

**- HIBA EZZIDEEN AL-HAJJI**

## Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji

### SYRIA

#### **EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT: THE GENDER DIMENSION OF THE EARTHQUAKE**

“People were already traumatised before the earthquake, because of the shelling, the bad economic situation and the feeling of neglect,” says Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji, who heads Equity and Empowerment, an organisation working to empower women to take part in public life in the HTS-controlled region of north-west Syria.

Equity and Empowerment transformed its community centre to a safe space for women affected by the earthquake to receive food, personal hygiene products, and psychological support. They gave women the space to discuss their experiences during the crisis, and collected these stories in a policy paper to ensure that women’s needs were addressed in the response to the earthquake.

“We believe that the earthquake has exacerbated existing gender inequalities, and we are committed to address women and girl’s specific needs in this situation,” she says. Hiba believes that humanitarian aid should go hand in hand with developing a culture of human rights. “You have the right to ask for food and shelter, but also the right to ask for democracy,” she says.

## SYRIA

### FOCUS ALEPPO: COVERING THE EARTHQUAKE IN NORTHERN SYRIA

When the earthquake hit Syria in February, *Focus Aleppo*'s journalists were personally affected. Some lost family members. Others lost their homes, and equipment including cameras and laptops. The journalists kept on reporting through the chaos—this is a media with extensive experience of working in areas of conflict.

“A sentence that was constantly repeated in our newsroom was ‘I have to work, write, photograph [...] otherwise I will die too.’ Continuing our work was crucial for our psychological safety,” says Ali Akhabour, *Focus Aleppo* founder.

An EED emergency grant helped *Focus Aleppo* continue operating and the team quickly adapted their way of working to respond to the crisis. A team of photographers toured the affected areas to document the impact of the disaster on residents.

As a local independent media, able to reach areas where major international media were absent, the outlet became a reliable source of information about the aftermath of the earthquake both locally and internationally. Its journalists also provided vital information to the affected people, informing them on access to material help and psychological support.

**“Most media outlets did not take the time to investigate the relationship between the disaster and political responsibility: many deaths could have been avoided with different government policies, but most media overlooked this”**

**- ENRICO DE ANGELIS**

## SYRIA

### SYRIAUNTOLD: UNDERREPORTED STORIES ABOUT THE EARTHQUAKE

The earthquake affected many of *SyriaUntold*'s journalists both personally and professionally, with some losing their houses in the disaster, yet they all kept on working. “They were already working in crisis conditions before the earthquake—and they had to keep working in a ‘crisis within a crisis’, but they were crucial in bringing out local voices from Syria,” says Enrico De Angelis, co-founder of *SyriaUntold*.

While many regional and international media focused on the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, within a brief period international media attention moved on from the fate of Syrian victims. “Most media outlets did not take the time to investigate the relationship between the disaster and political responsibility: many deaths could have been avoided with different government policies, but most media overlooked this,” says Enrico.

An EED emergency grant ensured that *SyriaUntold* had the capacity to publish a series of long-form articles highlighting the aftermath of the earthquake, which included pieces highlighting failures in the humanitarian response to the crisis, on environmental consequences, and on how the lives of local children have been affected.

# RESULTS AND LEARNING

**In 2023, EED continued to deliver and improve its Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning (MEL) procedures on all democracy support provided to EED's partners, and to foster sharing knowledge and lessons learned with internal and external stakeholders.**

## **MEL GUIDELINES**

Detailed MEL guidelines were approved in 2023, which describe EED's MEL system, from monitoring individual grants to monitoring and evaluating the results at the organisation-wide level. The updated MEL guidelines include a specific chapter on learning, detailing several processes that are introduced to further strengthen institutional learning, including Country Portfolio Reflection Meetings and the introduction of a Learning Working Group and Workplan.

## **MAKING MEL MEANINGFUL CONVENING**

EED organised a two-day MEL convening at EED's office in Brussels in collaboration with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to share MEL experiences and foster learning among democracy and human rights grant makers. Topics discussed included: approaches and methods for evaluating democracy and human rights support in a meaningful way; how to leverage MEL capacity among staff and grantees; and how to effectively synthesise grant level monitoring information and lessons learned. Several participants met again for a side-meeting during the American Evaluation Association's Annual Evaluation Conference, and a follow-up convening is planned in 2024.

## **REVIEW OF THE CENTRE FOR UKRAINIAN ACTIVISTS**

EED conducted a review of the Centre for Ukrainian Activists (CUA), established at the end of February 2022 in response to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine with the support of funding from Canada and the EU. The CUA offers free working space for Ukrainian activists and media professionals and a Work and Rest Programme is organised at its premises, which aims to strengthen the resilience of Ukrainian civic activists and media professionals. Operation of a centre and retreat programme of this kind is not part of EED's regular grant-making activities, and with donor funding coming to an end in 2023, this review enabled EED to reflect on the relevance, value-added aspect, and results of the CUA to inform its potential continuation and fundraising efforts.

The review demonstrated that there was a clear added value in the establishment of the CUA, as EED was able to quickly react, take risks and anticipate activists' emerging needs as the situation unfolded. While there is less need for the Centre's workspace, demand for programmes like the Work and Rest Programme continues to grow. Participants of the programme assessed it as highly relevant and effective. They valued its flexibility, and the fact that several members of an organisation or a whole team could join. They also appreciated the inclusion of psychological support services.

Over 175 civic activists and media professionals from more than 70 organisations have participated in the programme to date, allowing them to recharge their batteries, to learn about the importance of self-care, and how to deal with stress. In a feedback survey, 97 percent of programme participants noted that they felt improvements in their psycho-emotional condition and that the programme improved their efficiency, and 66 percent believed that the programme would help them improve their activities.

## **INTERNAL EVALUATION OF EED'S SUPPORT IN EGYPT**

In 2023, EED began a comprehensive evaluation of its support in Egypt to analyse the relevance and value-added aspect of EED's support, the effectiveness of this support, and to identify lessons. The time-period covered by the evaluation is January 2019 to December 2022, during which EED awarded around €6 million in funding or 50 grants. The evaluation is expected to be finalised during the first quarter of 2024.

## **BUILDING MEL CAPACITY**

EED continued building staff and country consultants' MEL capacity through MEL training and on-the-job assistance. Several MEL workshops were provided, and sessions were organised to facilitate learning and experience sharing.



# HUMAN RESOURCES AND BUDGET

EED's 61 staff members have lived and worked extensively in the countries where EED operates, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Palestine, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

Staff members are nationals of 27 countries, including Albania, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Egypt, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

In 2023, EED's traineeship programme allowed 18 trainees to gain work experience in democracy support by joining the operations, programme, communications and finance teams for one-year periods.

Many former trainees go on to have a career in the field of democracy support. Organisations where former trainees work include the European Institute for Peace, European Partnership for Democracy, Open Society Foundations,

Prague Civil Society Centre, Democracy Reporting International, Médecins du Monde, ICMPD, ALDA, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, European Youth Forum, the European Parliament and the European Commission. Other former trainees have obtained scholarships to continue their studies at the College of Europe in Bruges and Natolin.

Twenty-five European countries who are members of the Board of Governors have contributed to EED's programme budget to date, as has Canada through a special grant for Ukraine and Belarus. In 2023, EED also received contributions from Iceland. The EED operations budget is covered by a European Commission grant. In 2023, EED managed a budget of approximately €50 million.



Members of the Executive Committee with David McAllister MEP (Chair of the Board of Governors) at EED's 10th anniversary celebration in the Egmont Palace. (L-R) Sandra Breka; José María Muriel Palomino; Lisbeth Pilegaard (Chair); David Mc Allister MEP; Maria Ligor; Jerzy Pomianowski (EED Executive Director). © Pavol Demeš, Vice-chair of EED Executive Committee

# 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. Canada<sup>1</sup> also contributes through a special grant for Ukraine and Belarus.



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Bulgaria



Cyprus



Czech Republic



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Estonia



Finland



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Hungary



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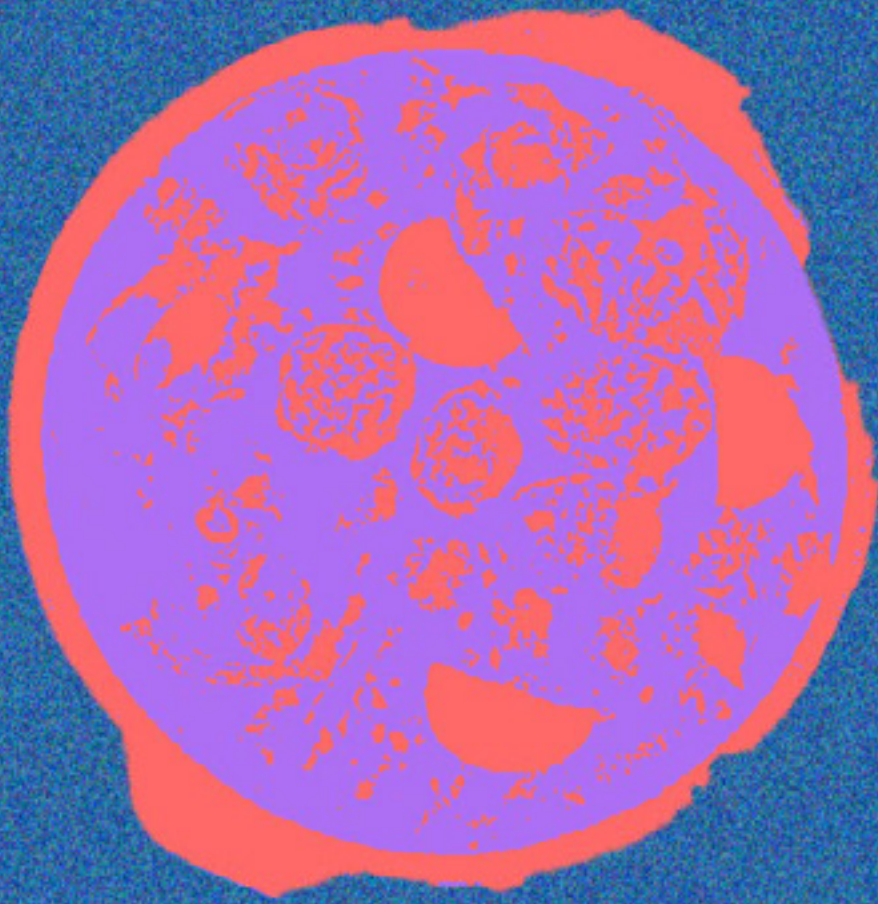
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In 2023, EED also received contributions from



Iceland







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This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of EED and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.



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# EUROPEAN

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