

Tunisian journalists look to build free press

By [Houda Trabelsi](#)

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Reporters in Tunisia say they face pressure that undermines their financial and editorial independence.

Tunisian journalists are examining how they can help strengthen the post-revolution media sector.

"Tunisian journalists are aware of the destruction that devastated the sector. We must reform it and urgently so as not to fall into dependency," said Mahmoud Dhaouadi of the Tunis Centre for Press Freedom, which organised a conference on press ethics last week in Tunis.

"Journalists are responsible for developing mechanisms in order to not have to start from nothing."

"The concept of responsibility of the media in the transitional period with regard to self-censorship is new to us, and we should definitely discuss it," he added.

The two-day seminar, which wrapped up on 29 November 2012, was also organised by the Erich-Brost Institute for International Journalism, the Technical University of Dortmund and Manouba University.

"We are here to exchange experiences since we noticed an extended role of social networks after the revolutions," commented Dr Susanne Fengler, director of the Erich-Brost Institute. "Media freedom is of utmost importance in Tunisia now. The press is seeking to play a role and overcome challenges."

She added that the meeting aimed at reaching a result that ensures a free press coupled with media responsibility.

"The press should be responsible and free, and our role here is to stir up the interest of the decision-makers in Tunisia," Fengler said. "We must exercise influence on politicians in order for the press to become free and responsible."

"The responsibility of the media is an important tool for media freedom. It should be used to develop and boost the economy through the development of the press and the increase of media outlets thus creating a competitive environment," she said.

The German expert concluded by saying that a free media requires "the independence of journalists, their credibility in dealing with news and their financial independence". Researcher, Judith Pies said her studies indicated that the media in Tunisia was "still suffering from pressures".

"We noticed that there was a clear improvement in the freedom of press in Tunisia after the revolution. Yet, we still

observed attempts by the government to interfere in the media sector," Pies said.

"About 45% of Tunisian journalists use social networks. This use is more prevalent than in western countries and therefore increases the responsibility of the journalist in reaching and disseminating information," she said.

Tunisian reporter, Mehdi Jelassi told Magharebia that freedom of the press was the country's "only tangible gain after the revolution" even though it continues to be threatened.

"Most Tunisian journalists are struggling to make a living. How can we talk about a responsible journalist when he can't even secure a decent income and a future?" wondered Tunisian journalist Mohamed Sghaier. "You cannot apply experiences of other countries to Tunisia because we live in a special situation that only Tunisians can understand."

"Freedom requires an atmosphere protected by a legislative framework that ensures the independence of the press from all authorities and not just the government," Jelassi said. "The responsibility of journalists lies in their commitment to ethics, independence from political and financial pressure groups."

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