

Pilot study on media accountability in the MENA region launched

Erich Brost Institute study explores situation 9 MENA countries

The Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism (TU Dortmund University, Germany) has published a pilot study on media accountability in nine MENA countries. The study includes Tunisia, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Libya and Algeria. The study is based on almost 100 qualitative interviews with local expert, and is available in Arabic and English language. It provides an overview of the emergence of press/media councils, ethic codes, ombudsmen, media criticism on social media, and other media accountability instruments in the MENA region, and critically discusses their potential role in restrictive regimes. In cooperation with the Samir Kassir Foundation, MENA Media Monitoring and Philip Madanat Consultancy, a series of high-profile online discussions to launch the study were conducted from February 23-25, 2021, reaching about 300 participants from the MENA region.

The pilot study outcomes show that only few selected aspects of media accountability instruments in MENA have been investigated during the past decades. Freedom of the media and freedom of expression are in many countries restricted by governments or by economic, religious, societal, or other actors, and independent self-regulatory bodies are often missing. However, in the digital age, new forums for media criticism have emerged online. Ayman Mhanna, Executive Director of the Samir Kassir Foundation in Lebanon summarized the findings of the study as following: “The respondents to the survey from each country did not endow the traditional MAIs with much trust. Social media turns out to be a preferred instrument of media accountability in MENA - including countries like Libya that lack most MAIs. Overall, a severe lack of financial sustainability has been identified as a major challenge for media accountability in the MENA region. The lack of safety and protection of journalists has been emphasized as the main threat to media accountability particularly in countries with protracted conflicts like Iraq, Syria or Libya. Media literacy is an essential component towards achieving a minimum degree of media accountability.”

Representatives from the media, such as journalists, journalists associations as well as media publishers, media NGOs and journalism educators in joint discussions emphasized the existing challenges in the MENA region related to Media Accountability, such as shortcomings in the media content, missing public engagement in correcting media content, lack of media accountability trainings at universities, and the necessity to promote media literacy among marginalized groups and decriminalize defamation.

In the online conferences, participants stressed that universities could play a more independent role, and could become a more active partner in carrying out media monitoring as a mechanism for accountability. They expressed the necessity to create an independent network of researchers from the MENA region and highlight the need to promote media literacy among the media audiences.

The representatives of NGOs, Media, journalism educators, journalists' associations as well as journalists themselves agreed to establish a regional network, with regular meetings and information-exchange and to use the network for future trainings opportunities. Prof. Dr. Susanne Fengler, director

of the Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism, suggested immediate measures to set up the joint network and to implement a platform related to educational materials on media accountability in Arabic language at the Arab Journalism Observatory web platform <https://ajo-ar.org/> as well as on the TU Dortmund university website (<https://brost.ifj.tu-dortmund.de/en/projects/media-accountability-in-the-mena-region/>) providing training material, research studies, handbooks and curricula. Prof. Fengler emphasized in her closing remarks that the Federal Germany Foreign Office will provide in 2021 financial means for further trainings and dialogue on Media Accountability in the MENA region.

The Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism has been active in the field of media self-regulation worldwide since 2010. The MediaAcT (Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe) project carried out a comparative study on media self-regulation mechanisms (Media Accountability) of the EU member states from 2010-2013 and made corresponding recommendations to the EU. Further publications such as "European Handbook of Media Accountability" and "Global Handbook of Media Accountability" (2021) are related to comparative study researches of Media Accountability in 43 countries. The Erich Brost Institute moreover operates with 13 institutes from different countries the online platform "European Journalism Observatory". Furthermore, projects such as workshops, training courses and seminars for journalists in the field of Media Accountability have been successfully carried out in Tunisia for several years with the success of establishing a network of ombudsmen.

Contact for further information:

Isabella Kurkowski/Prof. Susanne Fengler

Erich-Brost-Institute for International Journalism

Technical University Dortmund

44221 Dortmund

Germany

E-Mail: susanne.fengler@tu-dortmund.de

E-Mail: isabella.kurkowski@tu-dortmund.de

www.journalistik-dortmund.de

www.brost.org