

CONSULTATION ON EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY (ENP)

Comments from Civil Society on EU Democracy Support

European Endowment for Democracy (EED)
Survey and Recommendations

1 ENP AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

1.1 Democracy Support – Essential for Stability & Economic Development

Stability, economic development and democracy support cannot be dissociated. Strong, functional and independent institutions, founded on democratic principles and processes, are a prerequisite not only for the respect of fundamental freedoms, human integrity and the rule of law, but also for prosperous and safe environments. To ensure that a country's institutions function effectively and democratically, civil society must be empowered - to check the power of governmental bodies and thus serve as a core democratic voice/actor.

The partner countries in the EU Neighbourhood have ratified most of the international and regional human rights treaties and are therefore bound by them. Furthermore, the EU-Partner Country Association and/or Cooperation Agreements contain an "essential element" clause, which stipulates that the respect of fundamental freedoms and democratic values are an essential element of the cooperation between the two parties. Beyond the legal obligations

of partner countries, it is in the EU's own interest for a peaceful, stable and prosperous neighbourhood, that democracy and human rights support must remain the cornerstone of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

1.2 An Asymmetric Environment

The EU Neighbourhood is a complex and asymmetric environment. In a few EU Neighbourhood countries, the dominant dynamic is that of reforms, despite many challenges. In other countries, the pace of reforms has slowed down, and tensions have emerged, sometimes at the expense of the reform agenda. In yet others, the space available for pro-reform groups is extremely restricted and continues to shrink. Finally, several countries or territories are under occupation and/or in a war or quasi-war situation. In such cases, the priority is to lay the ground for the future.

1.3 Priority Areas of EU Actions: Local Civil Society as Motor for Democracy

The collapse of political regimes in some neighbouring countries has inevitably led to insecurity, instability and different levels of disorder. This mainly happened because state institutions were not able to perform properly and civil society actors were weakened, if existent at all.

The EU can restore long-lasting stability in the region only through **consistent support to building democratic institutions and empowering local actors of change.**

In March 2011, the *Joint Communication “A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the southern Mediterranean”*¹ identified the following priorities:

- 1) Democratic transformation and institution-building - fundamental freedoms, constitutional reforms, reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption
- 2) A stronger partnership with the people - support to civil society
- 3) Sustainable and inclusive growth and economic development.

Two months later (May 2011), the *Joint Communication “A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood – A Review of the Neighbourhood Policy”* further specified and extended these priorities to the entire EU Neighbourhood.² “Greater support to partners engaged in building **deep democracy**” was highlighted as one of the ENP’s four main goals. As per the communication, “deep democracy” includes:

- 1) Free and fair elections
- 2) Freedom of expression, assembly and association
- 3) Respect for rule of law and the right to a fair trial
- 4) Fight against corruption
- 5) Security and law enforcement sector reform.

It stressed the need to strengthen the EU’s partnership with societies and acknowledged the crucial role played by civil society organisations, political parties

and media in promoting and sustaining reforms. Especially in light of regional developments since 2011, **the above priority areas remain as important and valid as ever.**

2 Needs and Challenges of Civil Society Organisations: Voices from the Neighbourhood (EED Survey of Grantees)

EED was established to support unsupported civil society groups by providing its expertise, flexible instruments and speedy decisions. Open for “requests for support” since August 2013, EED has supported almost 200 civil society organisations, individual democracy activists, and informal groups of motivated and skilled, but un(der)supported people. In May 2015, EED sent a survey to 100 of its grantees (from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine), asking them to share their views on the implementation of the ENP - in light of their specific needs and challenges. Although based on a limited sample size, EED’s survey provides feedback from the ground – from one of the most important ENP target audiences.

2.1 Positive perception of EU democracy support – yet lack of local consultation

Over half the respondents recognised positive changes ascribable to the EU’s action and policies towards their countries (52.5%). In the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood, EU support is perceived as positive vis-a-vis independent media, NGOs and civil society, independence of

¹
http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/president/news/speeches-statements/pdf/20110308_en.pdf

²
http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf

the judiciary, local governance, people-to-people contacts and freedom of speech. In the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, EU support was perceived to have contributed to progress in youth activism, women's rights and in addressing domestic violence. Support to human rights defenders, civil society and cultural organisations, as well as governance and public administration reform, was also positively noted. Over 80% were aware of EU-supported civil society initiatives and democracy support in their countries, the only significant exception being Azerbaijan, where no example could be provided.

Half of the survey respondents agreed that EU support to democracy and human rights over the past four years was sufficient, and had led to visible improvements in legislation, people-to-people contacts, internally displaced persons' (IDP) rights, political participation of youth and women, government financial transparency and the development of civil society organisations.

The EU appears accessible - two thirds met with EU representatives over the past two years. Yet, there was a sense that they were not being asked for their views; 47% - mostly from Armenia, Belarus and Morocco - noted that their local insights on policy matters were not asked for.

2.2 More engagement is needed in restrictive and conflict environments

The EED survey sheds light on a number of local needs that ENP policies have failed to address. The EU is perceived as not sufficiently engaged in providing support to civil society operating in restrictive environments. Particularly in the Southern Neighbourhood, partner countries denounced the lack of an EU

strategy and engagement in conflict-resolution and peace-building. Most respondents from Lebanon, Libya and, to a lesser extent, Morocco and Tunisia, have never heard of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

One Azerbaijan respondent stated that "EU funding for independent NGOs has largely dried up" and noted the lack of opportunities for media in the two recent calls under the *European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights* (EIDHR).

According to 70%, the EU does not play a significant role in facilitating dialogue between local authorities and civil society organisations.

2.3 Local priorities for democracy support

Partners from the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood identified the following as their priority: 1) free and fair elections, 2) freedom of speech, 3) independent media, 4) fight against corruption, 5) support of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 6) small informal pro-democracy organisations.

Representatives of the EU's Southern Neighbourhood said that the EU should focus on: 1) human rights violations, 2) elections and electoral reform, 3) women's and minorities' rights, 4) media freedom, 5) fight against corruption, 6) criminal justice, 7) community building and 8) small regional initiatives by informal civil society groups.

2.4 Growing security and repression concerns

The personal security of civil society actors pursuing pro-democracy activities continues to be endangered, particularly in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Crimea. Respondents have been victims of arrests during

protests (Crimea), intimidations during election observation (Armenia), detention and ill-treatment (Syria and Palestine), and have received threats from armed militias, non-state armed groups and/or other extremist groups (Libya and Syria).

3 Recommendations: Best means to Support Pro-Democracy Actors

In addition to the described survey, EED invited partners³ from seven countries - Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Ukraine - to discuss recommendations with EED and 24 democracy support organisations working in the EU Neighbourhood during a half day workshop on 23 June. They have made the following recommendations to improve EU support to democracy in their countries and regions:

3.1 Respond to shrinking space for civil society and increase political support and engagement - including in conflict areas

- Enhance support to repressed civil society organisations, media and local political actors, to help them maintain a space in which civil society can operate freely
- Respond in a coordinated, consistent and vocal way to the violation of human rights, particularly to shrinking space for civil society and political detentions
- Further enhance institution and capacity building for civil society, to improve local governance of cooperation programmes
- Be consistent throughout different EU policies; ensure that cooperation with governments and support to civil society do not counter each other

- Increase political engagement with civil society working in conflict areas.

It is precisely in zones of crisis that civil society actors are most needed and require the most support. EED partners insist that greater international pressure helps them to hold their governments to account, and that EU cooperation with repressive regimes nullifies the positive effect of their support to civil society.

3.2 Insist on principle of conditionality

- Be stricter, more consistent and inclusive (involving civil society) in the verification of benchmarks and release of Budget Support funds. Also allow for updates, based on changing needs and situations.
- In addition to “more for more”, also apply “less for less”
- Add “more for less”, whereby civil society receives more when the government receives less; re-channel resources to civil society in countries that do not seek EU financial assistance or advice.

Civil society should not be the victim of their government's reluctance to engage in democratic reform. The EU should therefore shift from a state-centred to society-centred approach and perspective.

3.3 Adapt to local context and needs – allow differentiation

- Further differentiate ENP scope and objectives according to 1) regional and domestic contexts, 2) levels of country engagement, in addition to 3) space for civil society
- Make funding accessible to and sufficiently flexible for new grassroots pro-democracy groups, including in remote areas.

³ See Annex II for brief bios of 9 partners.

3.4 Reach out to more local actors beyond capitals

- Engage and consult more with a wider range of pro-democracy groups, including business, new movements and pro-democracy activists
- In addition to existing structures (e.g. Civil Society Forums) use more professional, innovative, as well as decentralised on- & off-line consultation tools
- Reinforce efforts to support local actors of change, and enable local ownership of reforms.

NB. This will require less bureaucratic EU work and procedures and/or more resources, to prioritise people-to-people contacts.

3.5 Invest in better communicating the importance of democracy and human rights

- Adopt a new narrative that focuses on democratic principles (rather than “EU values”) as inherent rights of all citizens. Mainstream references to civil society and human rights in communications on various sectors of cooperation
- Be more transparent on EU-Partner Country agreements – publish the texts as soon as possible! *The lack of transparency goes against democratic norms, and raises suspicions over an EU ‘hidden agenda’.*
- Communicate in a more passionate way, as media studies have proven that audiences in the entire EU Neighbourhood are more responsive to emotional arguments
- Focus on the concrete impact of EU policies on citizens
- Help increase internet access in remote areas beyond the capitals.

3.6 Deploy EU's soft power and security tools more frequently and convincingly

- Advocate the right to express solidarity – to support people who defend democratic principles, and for those people to receive transparent support

The EU should not allow government pressure or politically-motivated administrative or legislative measures (e.g. Russia's foreign agents law or anti-NGO legislation in Egypt or Azerbaijan) to violate this right.

- Integrate EU Common Security & Foreign Policy (CSFP) and Common Security & Defence Policy (CSDP) tools (e.g. support of civilian security sector reform) in ENP, including a human rights dimension to EU trainings
- Use a stronger language to highlight the shared security of the EU and its neighbours.

3.7 Develop a longer-term strategy

- Increase investments in education and culture, including scholarships, student mobility and use of social media for educational purposes

Education is a key means to tackle issues of migration and terrorism and to improve investment climates.

- Strengthen the independence of countries most exposed to threats from the Russian state, with increased cooperation in trade and energy markets
- Based on associated and candidate countries' experience, introduce a system of screenings for countries committed to adapt 80% of the EU acquis
- Envisage tangible “next steps” of integration beyond AA/DCFTAs and visa-free regimes.

EU leverage and popular support can only be maintained with future incentives.

ANNEX I

EED survey: Overview of qualitative results

Do you think the EU has provided stronger support to democracy and human rights in your country during the past four years?



If yes, please provide examples of such support.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| ARMENIA: | Legislation improved towards EU standards; visa facilitation; people to people contacts; more EU support of projects led by public figures & organisations. |
| BELARUS: | The 2010-launched REFORUM (reform plan to support European dialogue with Belarusian citizens on country's modernisation, proposed by the <i>Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies</i>). |
| GEORGIA: | Political participation of youth and women; rights of disabled and internally-displaced persons (IDP). |
| MOLDOVA: | Pressure on government for financial transparency; raising awareness on EU-Moldova relations; implementation of Association Agreement (AA). |
| MOROCCO: | Support of projects that would have never been supported by the national government; a great help for local civil society. |
| PALESTINE: | Stronger programmes to support democratisation; EU-developed policies holding Israel accountable (but it is not enough). |
| SYRIA: | Asylum, advocacy & lobbying. Still, the EU could do better. |
| TUNISIA: | EU-funded actions against despotic power. |
| UKRAINE: | Financial and democracy support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). |

NO: 20%: UKRAINE
 50%: ARMENIA, LEBANON, MOROCCO & SYRIA
 60%: PALESTINE; 75%: TUNISIA; 100%: AZERBAIJAN & LIBYA

If not, please suggest what could be done in this regard.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| AZERBAIJAN: | Support for independent media; speak out against human rights violations; flexible media capacity-building (i.e. training in third countries); sanctions against top officials. |
| LIBYA: | Strong support of civil society (in particular focusing on Human Rights), as it is very weak vis-à-vis strong militias. |
| ARMENIA: | More transparency. |
| LEBANON: | Increase support to non-established organisations. <i>"EU policies are only focused on big partnerships with governmental institutions; support to civil society is limited to established organisations."</i> |
| MOROCCO: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support NGOs, in particular smaller, younger grassroots ones; be more flexible in selection criteria; provide technical support and mentoring - Stop "outsourcing" migration policy to countries which do not respect human rights - do not sign the re-admission agreement. - Conduct needs assessment missions before allocating funds. - Put real conditionality on funds (e.g.: reform of the judiciary system, national gender equality plan). |
| SYRIA: | Bolder action to give real support to grassroots organisations rather than huge funds to very big entities. |
| PALESTINE: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on civilians' rights and vulnerable groups: <i>"the level of human rights is deteriorating"</i>. - Allow Israeli-Palestinian NGO partnerships for EU funding. - Bottom-up approach in democracy promotion; be more innovative in trainings and move away from outdated traditional methods & workshops in order to adapt to grassroots and periphery. |
| TUNISIA: | Be more flexible in funding civil society; democracy should also be spread in small villages, through citizen participation. |
| UKRAINE: | Organise more public thematic meetings with media & local government; disseminate more information on the EU; provide legal aid to CSOs in Crimea. |

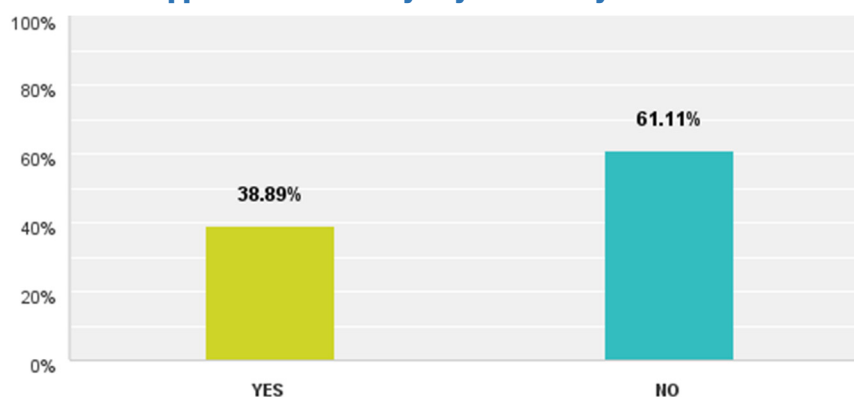
What should the EU focus on in its relation with your country? Please list your priority areas.

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| ARMENIA: | Work with real NGOs and activists; transparent and fair elections; freedom of speech and media; effective fight against poverty & corruption; hold authorities accountable on human rights obligations. |
| AZERBAIJAN: | Independent media; work to release political prisoners; do not overrate the potential of the <i>Southern Gas Corridor</i> , which relies on Turkmen and Iranian supplies (unlikely in the short/medium run). |
| BELARUS: | Media, civil society initiatives and education about the EU. |
| GEORGIA: | Capacity-building for civil society; make assistance to the government conditional upon democratic reforms; conflict-resolution; local development. |
| LEBANON: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a consultation mechanism with main local civil society actors (through collective discussions etc.) to better identify society's priorities. - Continue supporting successful projects to help institutionalise their results (e.g. death penalty project, civil marriage law). - Build capacities of grassroots, independent and popular entities working within marginalised communities. |

- Monitor elections; support electoral reform.
- Deal with gender issues and human rights violations.
- Help settle the conflict between refugees and host community; support projects fighting sectarianism & the growth of fanatic groups.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| LIBYA: | Fight human rights' abuses of militias; help government bring peace & security. |
| MOLDOVA: | Community building, local governance & decentralization reforms; judicial reform; agriculture and rural development; free trade; energy security; AA & DCFTA implementation; provide EU membership perspective. |
| MOROCCO: | Freedom of media & expression; women's and minority rights; youth political participation; good governance; democracy promotion & human rights. <i>"Morocco should not be addressed as the positive regional exception in the Arab world. Politics are still authoritarian and the economy remains corrupted and inefficient." "EU's silence about media persecution is regrettable."</i> |
| PALESTINE: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rule of law, legal aid to vulnerable groups, gender & criminal justice - Electoral reform - Cultural cohesion between West Bank and Gaza & between both Palestinians in Israel, more cultural activities in Gaza - Less traditional trainings on gender and human rights awareness, which are ineffective - Youth involvement in civic action (in particular vis-a-vis environment, the disabled and elderly), knowledge transfer between elderly and youth. |
| SYRIA: | Human rights; transitional justice; democracy & democratic transition; fair Peace Process; accountability; civilian protection; humanitarian aid. |
| TUNISIA: | Human rights; media freedom; fight against public sector corruption; youth; education; free internet; employment; build democracy from scratch, from small villages to big cities. |
| UKRAINE: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independent media & CSOs; create information & consultation EU Centre in Ukraine - Fight against corruption; improve the business & investment environment - Financial & social programmes for IDPs; regional political & social dialogue - Monitor & control authorities on democratic reforms - Visa-free travel <i>"EU should provide quarterly expert assessment of the Ukrainian parliament and government."</i> |

Are you satisfied with EU support to civil society in your country?



| Answer Choices | Responses |
|----------------|-----------|
| YES | 38.89% 14 |
| NO | 61.11% 22 |
| Total | 36 |

NO: 25%: MOROCCO
 50%: GEORGIA
 75%: ARMENIA & LEBANON
 100%: AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, LIBYA, PALESTINE, SYRIA & TUNISIA

What could the EU do more or better in this regard?

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| MOLDOVA: | Facilitate small grant schemes for CSOs; business opportunities; job creation; cultural activities. |
| UKRAINE: | Strengthen civil society; increase volume of youth study programmes; financial programmes to attract investors; 'less talks more action'; more regional initiatives. |
| MOROCCO: | Simpler funding procedures <i>"It's easier to get money from the Makhzen (a government institution) than from the EU."</i> |
| GEORGIA: | Support new and/or small CSOs; flexibility; core funding; support to media. |
| ARMENIA: | Transparency; more stable, targeted, longer-term support. |
| LEBANON: | Re-focus support on local needs; emphasize democracy. <i>"Support initiatives like the EED can be very effective in improving civil society."</i> |
| AZERBAIJAN: | Independent media; speak out against human rights violations; capacity-building for journalists through flexible working models (i.e. trainings in third countries); sanctions against top officials. |
| BELARUS: | Increase EU visibility. |
| LIBYA: | Stronger support to civil society. |
| PALESTINE: | Focus more on community-based organisations; widen and strengthen consultation network to identify real needs; increase Palestinian ownership of projects and strategies. <i>"International NGOs should foresee their own exit strategy to allow local Palestinian ownership."</i> <i>"International women's and human rights' organizations have not been effective."</i> |
| SYRIA: | Create funding calls for Syrian NGOs; transparency, accountability and monitoring of EU funds; NGO empowerment & capacity building; engage Syrian civil society in regular EU advocacy; peace talks. |
| TUNISIA: | More civil society consultations on programmes to support them; trainings for media and politicians; reach out to citizens through local and regional associations. |

ANNEX II:

EED Partners/Participants in Workshop

“COMMENTS FROM THE EU NEIGHBOURHOOD: HOW CAN THE EU SUPPORT DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS”

Bios in Brief

Nabil Belkabir (Morocco) is the co-founder and national coordinator of the EED-supported *Union of Students for Change in the Education system*. A human rights activist and advocate for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) rights, he is a member of the movements *20 February* and *Womanchoufouch* against sexual harassment and violence towards women. Nabil is currently studying Political Science in Morocco.

Iulian Groza (Moldova) is researching European integration at the EED-supported *Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE)*, a newly established Moldovan think-tank. He was *Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration* from June 2013– February 2014, after working for the Moldovan Mission to the EU. Iulian continues to actively promote Moldova's European integration. Licensed in law, Iulian has a degree in European and NATO Security Studies from the *European Research Institute at Birmingham University*.

Lousineh Hakobyan (Armenia) co-founded the EED-supported human rights NGO *Europe in Law Association*. A licensed lawyer, she has personally represented media and journalists in several defamation cases. *Europe in Law Association* has also defended members of the opposition party, and is actively training journalists, lawyers and judges in media standards and electoral law. In 2014 *Europe in Law Association* started monitoring the appointments of public officials, including the Armenian judge at the *European Court of Human Rights*. With degrees in Teaching and Philology (*Yerevan State University*), Law (*Moscow International Business Academy*) and in European Law (*Queen Mary University of London*), Lousineh has worked with numerous NGOs and international organisations.

Sergi Kapanadze (Georgia), Deputy Foreign Minister from 2011-12, is director of the EED-supported think tank *Georgia's Reforms Associates* (GRASS). A member of the OSCE panel of *Eminent persons on European security* since 2015, he is also dean of the *Caucasus University's School of Governance* and associate professor of international relations at *Tbilisi State University*. From 2005-11 he served the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, leading its *Department of International Organisations* the last three years. In 2006, he also served as Senior Advisor in the President's *Analytical Group* after being policy analyst at the *National Security Council's International Security Department*. Sergi holds a PhD in International Relations from *Tbilisi State University*.

Omar Shaban (Palestine) is the founder of the EED-supported Gaza think tank *PalThink for Strategic Studies*. He is also active in many other human rights and development organisations: founder of *Amnesty International's* Palestinian group, *Asala for women* association for microfinance, *Institute of Good Governance*, *Aid Watch Palestine* (www.aidwatch.ps). Politically independent, Omar is a Middle East political/economic analyst and regularly writes for various international magazines. He holds a *Masters of Science* in Entrepreneurial Studies from *Stirling University*, Scotland and a BA in Economy from Egypt.

Oleksandr Solontay (Ukraine) is one of the leaders of the EED-supported *Syla Ludei* party (*Power to the People*)- previously a civic movement. A former deputy of the *Transcarpathian Regional Council* and member of the *Uzhgorod City Council*, he is a lead expert at the *Institute of Political Education*, where he coaches local administration, including development, decision-making and management. Author of numerous books on local communities and corruption in local authorities, Oleksandr co-authored textbooks for local council deputies and civil society organisations (link to his works: <http://www.ipo.org.ua/lib>). He has an educational background in International Relations.

Olfa Soukri Cherif (Tunisia) is a member of the Parliament's Finance Committee. Prior to being an MP, she was professor in Economics at the *Insitut Supérieur de Sciences Humaines* in Tunis, and in Mathematics and Statistics at the *University of Paris, Sorbonne*, where she also studied. Olfa is an advocate of democratic consolidation, and sees sustainable development as the means to achieve it. Vice chair of the *Parliamentary Network of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund*, she has worked as an OECD consultant. Olfa is the alumni president of *Association internationale d'Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales* (AIESEC) and has an executive MBA in trade policy from *Harvard University*.

Sorina Stefirta (Moldova) is director of the EED-supported *School of Advanced Journalism* in Chisinau. Editor-in-chief and coordinator of the daily newspaper *TIMPUL* for over ten years, she was also editor of the news supplement *European Objective*. Sorina teaches political journalism, focusing on EU institutions. She was a consultant for the Prime Minister's advisor and for the German Cooperation GIZ office in Moldova. She holds degrees in journalism and public relations and is a member of the *Moldovan Union of Journalists*.

Mouna Trabelsi (Tunisia) is president, co-founder and trainer of the EED-supported *Alternative Media NGO*, which trains women all over Tunisia, in particular in isolated rural areas, in journalism, human rights and communications. Mouna also worked as a national radio journalist and for a Tunisian communications agency, as well as a translator for a multinational company. She has a Master's degree from the *Tunisian Institute of Press*.