



Dates: April-May 2012

Region: EU

The Media Diversity Institute (MDI) provided onsite consultancy in media relations for four European NGOs during April and May 2012. Led by experienced consultants and BBC journalists Tim Grout-Smith and Lily Poberezhska, the aim of the onsite consultancies was to provide tailored advice to the NGOs on how to use the media more effectively to assist them in combating discrimination.

The NGOs receiving the support were the **Equality and Diversity Forum**, based in the UK, the **European Forum of Muslim Women**, and the **European Network Against Racism**, both based in Brussels, and also the **Open Republic Association**, based in Poland.

Equality and Diversity Forum

Onsite consultancy was provided to the UK-based Equality and Diversity Forum to advise them on how to utilise the media in their campaign to challenge the British government's plans to replace the Human Rights Act (HRA), the main human rights protection in the UK, with a so-called British Bill of Rights. Guidance was also provided on how to raise awareness among the British public of the importance of the HRA and also to increase support for it.

European Forum of Muslim Women

A consultation on media strategy with eleven Muslim women from six European nations presented a unique experience for the MDI consultants. They worked for two days in Brussels with the European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW) in the district of Saint Josse, and while the majority were from EFOMW or its affiliates in France and Belgium, they also met women from the UK, Ireland, Greece and Italy. While all were ethnically from North Africa or Iraq, it was remarkable to see how each woman had become so integrated to their European homes that they clearly demonstrated the mannerisms and attitudes of the nation involved. For example, those from France used Gallic shrugs and pouts to emphasise their points, and protested that blogging as practised by the Anglo-Saxons was too intellectually lightweight to interest the French, and Dalia from Italy wanted to know if she could wear the hijab and be "cool" and fashionable. Najatte from Belgium agreed that initially she had found the Anglo-Saxon informal blogging style unusual, but now she quite liked it. It raised the question to the consultants of just how dominated people are by the notion of the Internet as a uniform, largely "made in America" structure.

EFOMW works closely with FEMYSO (the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations). FEMYSO has been re-designing their website following previous training provided to them by MDI, and EFOMW were keen to learn from their experience.

Also present in Brussels was Layla Azzouzi, from the Belgian affiliate of EFOMW. Layla is something of a cause celebre in Belgium; while working as an advisor to a Catholic party in the local council of Verviers, she decided to "take the veil", and amid much media interest, attended a meeting of the council in her hijab. The Catholic party expelled her to considerable controversy, and she is now standing as an independent council candidate in the coming October elections; one veteran party member resigned in protest to her treatment and another councillor was expelled by the party for supporting her. Layla told the workshop that the media

scrum had at first frightened and infuriated her, but after a while she began to realise that they only wanted a good story from her. She has resultantly struck up a good relationship with the journalists, where she firmly states the scope of what she will discuss in the publicity for her cause, and uses media promotion to show that there is nothing “alien” about the hijab. Layla presented a very good illustration of the importance of understanding what the media want and how mutual benefit can be gained through cooperation—thus promoting the aim of the onsite consultancy training in using the media effectively to foster understanding and combat discrimination.

European Network Against Racism



The second consultation in Brussels with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) gave facilitating consultants Tim and Lily interesting insight into the realities of preaching tolerance in an economic crisis with extreme right elements visible in both France and Greece prior to their elections. The Belgian director of ENAR’s secretariat, Michaël Privot, said they had decided it was useless to expect politicians to adopt progressive policies on discrimination on their own initiative at this time, and it was best to reach out to the public and get them to reject far right attitudes and put pressure as constituents on their representatives. As ENAR represents the voice of 700 organisations in the 27 EU member states, getting through to so many different electorates is a daunting task. The consultants decided to practise a campaign strategy plan with the country they all knew best, Belgium, and it soon became apparent that this was practically the most difficult country the consultants could have chosen—two radically different language-based regions and Brussels in one small country. Rather than Belgium being a fine example of harmony to the rest of the EU, it seems to embody many of the most divisive tendencies in Europe today.

Open Republic Association



Tim and Lily held two days of consultations in Warsaw with eleven staff and volunteers for the Open Republic Association (ORA) which opposes racism, anti-semitism and xenophobia. The consultants were surprised to hear that ORA staff and volunteers (all in their twenties or early thirties) found few schoolchildren they trained knew anything of Poland's Jewish past. Schoolchildren had no idea that the population of Warsaw before WWII was 30% Jewish with 400 synagogues in the city. They seemed equally unclear about the events of the war, despite numerous memorials and murals commemorating the ghetto and the Warsaw Uprising. Even on a short visit to the city it was possible to see anti-Jewish graffiti in respectable districts, and ORA volunteers raised the paradox of Polish neo-Nazis, who clearly had no idea that Hitler considered the Poles "untermensch". The young people of ORA are faced with the daunting task of eliminating this deep-rooted prejudice, and are tackling their work with enthusiasm, intelligence and determination.

The onsite consultancy work outlined above was part of an 18-month project – The Ethical Journalism Initiative – conducted by the International Federation of Journalists in cooperation with the Media Diversity Institute and Article 19 to improve media coverage of ethnicity, race and religion and other forms of diversity throughout the EU. The project was funded by the European Commission and the Open Society Foundations.

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