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Country: Tunisia



'In the beginning there was doubt. Now there is a dialogue'. This statement by the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) Executive Director epitomises the work done in less than a year with more than 130 people - journalists, editors, security officials and security experts. They were interviewed to assess media practices in Tunisia related to reporting on security issues, conflict, and extremism.

The results were presented in the ["Media & Security in Tunisia"](#) Study which was launched at the conference held on 14 March in the Tunisian capital.

The author of the study, MDI country coordinator Dr *Sahbi Ben Nabli*, insisted that the next step should be concrete and comprehensive: ‘

We feel committed and obliged to bring those stakeholders to the next stage - the Action!

Emphasising the importance of mutual understanding and respect between different

stakeholders in the field, the new Tunisian State Secretary for Security Affairs, Rafik Chelli, who opened the MDI event, called for a further dialogue between the sectors. *‘Building trust between the sectors but with the public too, is crucial in our War on Terror, because this war does not happen only in our mountains, it happens in the media, too. So, we all need to be careful with how far we go in giving and passing information without jeopardising the lives of our forces’*.



Mohamed Ali Laroui, spokesman for the Tunisian Ministry of Information, complimented the series of roundtables organised by the MDI team within the project [“Responsible and Free Reporting on Security Issues in Tunisia”](#).

“: ‘*These events gave us an opportunity to face our impediments, one of them being the confidentiality issue. If 70% of radio content is related to security, we all have to agree on the best ways to treat this issue. Let the 2015 be the year of improvement. We have the study recommendations now, and we have the action plan’.*

The Tunisian Ministry of Defence Spokesman, Belhassen Oueslati, who also participated in the development of the recommendations and the action plan, expressed hope that neither of them would only ‘stay in the book’. *‘Study without an action cannot help very much’.*

Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Wenham, Spokesman of the British Armed Forces and formerly NATO, who was contributing with his experience and expertise through the whole MDI project, has seen ‘a huge progress in this dialogue between media and the military’.

‘There is still significant work to be done: what is needed is the change of the mind-set among

military forces so that they get more pro-active in using information, as well as among media actors – for them to see security forces as the credible sources of information,’ said Wenham at the launching of the Study event

Agreeing with this statement,

Dr

Rikke Bjerg Jensen from Holloway University of London, put it simply: ‘Set the goals and work on them’



Hema Kotecha, Regional Conflict Adviser at Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which funded the project, praised the efforts and the achievements of all three sectors – security, media and civil society – for moving in such a short period from ‘reservations to dialogue’.

‘MDI will do its best to further facilitate this process’, said MDI Executive Director Milica Pesic.

‘The Action Plan is rather ambitious, but we will move step by step. The next one is the mentorship for journalists who want to specialise in reporting on security, an MA in Media and Security for future journalists and a hands-on media communication workshop for security spokespersons. We are looking into a stage where security officials would have their “confidants” among journalists, both aware that they are not friends and that they have different interests, but the same goal – to do good for the Tunisian public.’