



17 February Revolution: Media in north-eastern Libya

REPORT

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ims

INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA SUPPORT

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Acronyms

IMC	Independent Media Center
IMS	International Media Support
LTC	Local Transitional Council
MCC	Media and Communication Committee
NTC	National Transitional Council

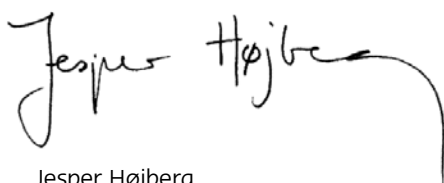
1 Foreword

International Media Support (IMS) has undertaken two missions to north-eastern Libya since rebels took control of the region in early 2011 and ended the 42-year reign of Muammar Gaddafi.

The first fact-finding mission to Benghazi was carried out in May 2011 to engage with the new media emerging in north-eastern Libya. The team interviewed Libyan media representatives about their media organisations, their visions and ambitions and their needs for training in the short and long term. Based on these interviews, an initial mapping of the media landscape in Benghazi and an assessment of the media environment took place.

In June 2011, IMS was back again in Benghazi to develop and update the media assessment, and look at possibilities to support new and independent media in north-eastern Libya. Particular attention was given to the potential for establishing an independent media institute in Libya.

With this report, IMS wishes to share its findings from our two missions with other international media development organisations. We call for a united effort to help professionalise Libyan media and to help secure the foundations of a liberal legal frame for the media in the “new” Libya.



Jesper Højberg
Executive Director
International Media Support (IMS)

2 Introduction

During the reign of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya has rated as one of the least free countries in the Arab region – also in terms of freedom of expression. In the now liberated north-eastern part of Libya, all media outlets were tightly controlled by the regime. Most media workers interviewed by IMS in Benghazi in May and June 2011 agreed that the news disseminated during the 42 years of Gaddafi's reign was “irrelevant”. No media reports on internal or foreign politics could be trusted as all media was entirely controlled by the state.

The 17 February “revolution” and “liberation” of north-eastern Libya has left the media in this region in a new situation, free of restrictions of the regime. This has resulted in a boom of new and more independent media. However, most of these are still embryonic and in need of professional skills.

The media landscape in north-eastern Libya is constantly changing. Ultimately, its future potential for development depends on the outcome of the conflict and fate of Colonel Gaddafi. However, the current liberated status of north-eastern Libya provides a window of opportunity to support and strengthen new and independent media, crucial for the future democratic stability of the region.

This report provides a snapshot of the media landscape as it stands this summer, 2011.



Map of Libya courtesy of UN.

3 The media environment in north-eastern Libya

Since the uprising in February 2011 and liberation of north-eastern Libya, this part of the country has seen an explosion of new and independent media. At the time of writing (July 2011), some 120 publications, five radio stations and three to five TV stations are now on the street and in the air, according to the Media Communication Committee (MCC), the media arm of the National Transitional Council.

Two newspapers which were published in north-eastern Libya before the revolution remain: Akhbar Benghazi and Corinne (now re-named Berniq). They have survived and have been re-launched with a pro-revolutionary orientation, although they are still by many largely perceived to be a product of a past era. According to sources to whom IMS spoke, these newspapers remain the biggest in terms of sale and at least one is developing in a relatively objective and neutral direction content-wise.

Large numbers of new media outlets are surfacing. Near the old Court House in central Benghazi and in the former Cultural Centre, an exciting new and independent media environment is emerging. Everything from Facebook activists, children's magazines and youth weeklies, to the "official" Sawt al Hurra Libya (voice of Free Libya) is on offer.

The new print media spans from pamphlets to professional magazines. Their typical circulation figure is 2000-5000 and many are either weekly or bi-weekly publications. The new media outlets that have emerged are mostly run by very young people. Few of these people have any previous experience with or education in journalism.

Since the onset of the revolution, all schools and universities have been shut. The emerging print and media markets give the young people something useful to do while waiting for life to return to normal. The driving force amongst large segments of young people interviewed by IMS is the desire to personally contribute to making change happen – to act, to do something. However, this situation also makes the media very volatile in the medium and longer-term perspective.

Another issue that adds to the instability of the media development situation is the lack of funding. Most new newspapers have a weak financial foundation, as there is hardly any support for newspaper production or advertising management of any sort. Most papers and magazines cover their print costs from their own pockets or with short-term support from various sources.

A significant characteristic of all the newly emerged media is that practically all involved have a background in other professions (engineers, doctors, dentists, students etc.) Most left their job or studies when the revolution began – and most expect to go back to their job or studies. Few have a clear picture of their future in media and a majority of those who are active now may not continue in media when normal conditions have been re-established. A considerable decline in the number of media can be expected if and when this time comes.

Amongst the challenges facing new and upcoming media is therefore the lack of professional journalistic skills, the lack of funding and knowledge of



From the streets of Benghazi,
Libya, June 2011.
Photo: Torben Brandt/IMS

concrete business models, which will keep new media outlets afloat in the long term. Some media actors also highlighted the lack of an independent printing facility as a challenge as well as a fear of the old mentality of controlling the media manifesting itself in the media environment.

3.1 Central media actors

Three key entities play a major role in the current media environment in north-eastern Libya:

- The National Transitional Council (NTC)
- The Local Transitional Council (LTC)
- The Independent Media Centre (IMC)

The National Transitional Council (NTC) was established as a form of transitional revolution authority under which the Media and Communication Committee (MCC) presides. Its status and mandate is not yet clear, although its task allegedly is to handle PR and communication with the media for the NTC. The NTC has appointed a minister of media and information, Mr. Mahmoud Shammam. Mr. Shammam is based in Qatar, and also runs Libya al-Ahrar, the first Libyan satellite TV station which broadcasts from Qatar.

The Benghazi-based Local Transitional Council (LTC) (there is a Local Transitional Council in every "liberated" city) has so far organised itself to issue licenses for new media outlets. Mohammed Fannoush, who is based in the former Cultural Centre of Benghazi, which hosts a large number of newspapers and magazines, is the coordinator of media and culture at the Local Transitional Council. At this level, Mohammed Fannoush is responsible for providing the licenses. According to Mr. Fannoush: "It is very easy to get a license. They write their names and the type of newsletter or newspaper it is, and I okay it."

The Independent Media Centre (IMC) appears to be one of the most organised sizable entities in the current Libyan media environment. It was established during the first days of the revolution, before the creation of the LTC and NTC. IMCs exist in all liberated cities in Libya.

The IMC is run by a group of educated volunteers and academics and is located in a building close to the former Court House. It was this entity that from the first hint of the revolution acknowledged the power of free media and accommodated the international press. Since then, it has grown and now houses:

- "Libya February 17th", the first newspaper in Benghazi after the February 17th revolution
- The International Press Centre (housed at the IMC from the start of the revolution until May)
- A studio for recording of music (mainly political hip hop)
- Archives/documentation of the revolution
- A video studio
- Cartoon/drawing and poster production

The overall agenda of the Media Centre is to work for a united Libya, the departure of Colonel Gaddafi and securing the independence of media.

4 Media in north-eastern Libya

Based on interviews with media and the media assessment carried out, IMS has chosen to highlight the following media operating in Benghazi at the time of writing.

4.1 Newspapers and magazines

Libya February 17th was the first independent newspaper to be published in the liberated areas of Libya. The first issue was already on the streets by 24 February, one week after the beginning of the uprising and before the establishment of the LTC and was therefore not required to apply for a media license. Libya February 17th has the traditional layout of a newspaper and a circulation of around 7000 copies, which is relatively high in comparison to other papers. The premises of the newspaper are located in the Independent Media Centre.



Newspaper salesman.
Photo: Michael Irving
Jensen/IMS

Bernice Post is a weekly bi-lingual journal located together with Asda' al-Suluq, Sawt and Omar al-Mukhtar Magazine in the former Cultural Centre of Benghazi, run under the auspices of Muhammed Fannoush.

Like most of the new papers, it is run by energetic but untrained young people in their early twenties. They have yet to decide on the aim of the paper or any longer-term plans. They are doing very well in terms of graphics and layout, but the paper lacks journalistic quality.

Asda' al-Suluq (Echoes of Suluq) is a small newly established newspaper based in Benghazi and in the village of Suluq, some 25-30 km outside Benghazi. Three of its writers are based in Benghazi and three work from their village. The first issue was published on 1 May 2011 and has a circulation of around 2000 copies.

Sawt is another newly formed, weekly newspaper located in the Cultural Centre. It is headed by a young student in his mid-20s. Sawt's layout is more professional than that of other papers and targets a young audience. As a novel initiative, they have placed a box in the old Court House where young people can hand in articles and comments which are then printed in the weekly paper.

Intefathat Al-Ahrar is bi-lingual and linked to a charity and language school called Tawasul. The organisation existed prior to the revolution and is headed by the charismatic Ms. Amina al-Magreihbi. She is also affiliated with the Gar Younis University (Benghazi), where she is an associate professor of English. The weekly is run by a group of young volunteers. While Colonel Gaddafi still governed Benghazi, the newspaper was granted permission to publish, but it declined because it was instructed to put a picture of Gaddafi on its front page.

Berniq (Cyrenaica) is a former regime newspaper which changed its name in the course of the revolution. It was previously under the umbrella of Seif al-Islam. The regime-friendly editor fled in mid-February and the paper was taken over by the journalists on the paper. In contrast to most of the new newspapers published since the uprising, Berniq has the character and authentic look of a newspaper.

Akhbar Benghazi (News from Benghazi) also existed prior to the revolution. It has not changed its name, but has altered its political orientation and is according to IMS' sources still widely distributed.

Omar al-Mukhtar Magazine distinguishes itself by being a monthly magazine. They have however not managed to publish any issues yet.

4.2 Radios

Sawt Libya al-Hurra began broadcasting on 21 February 2011. They took over the facilities of the former state-controlled radio.¹ The station is under the auspices of the Local Transitional Council and is viewed by many as the mouthpiece of the revolution.

Radio Shabab Libya FM is a radio station launched in late April 2011. As is the case with most other media in north-eastern Libya, the station is run by a group of untrained but enthusiastic, young, secular Libyans with an educational background stemming from technical school. They broadcast on 101.1 FM.

In early May 2011 the radio was moved to a closed school where they set up a small studio. The bulk of their broadcast is music comprised of folk and

¹ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/04/08/press-freedom-eastern-libya-sparks-media-boom/>

western music, political Libyan rap and nationalistic anthems. Their intention is to produce discussion programmes, and they have already set up agreements with other young people, primarily charity and youth organisations based in Tawasul, to produce these programmes for them.

The young people behind Shabab Libya share the desire to convey the voice of the Libyan people to their listeners. Their aim is to represent a new generation, which radios like Sawt Libya al-Hurra (see above for description) do not reach.

Tribute FM is an English-speaking FM and online radio, mainly run by Libyan youth from the diasporas in Great Britain and USA that have returned. In their evening talk-show they discuss present and future challenges for Libya. Their online broadcast is available on www.tributefm.com.

4.3 Television

Libya al-Ahrar is a satellite channel which has been broadcasting from Doha since 30 March 2011. It is very professional, and is on the air several hours daily. The channel's director, Mahmud Shammam is a former US-based journalist and human rights activist who lives in Qatar. Mr. Shammam is a member of the "crisis team", a sort of executive or governing branch of the National Transitional Council (NTC). His position is that of Minister of Media and Information.

Libya al-Hurra TV is a relatively new TV initiative presented as a continuation of the internet TV initiative started by the late Muhammad Nabbous, who was killed by snipers in Benghazi in March 2011.

LTC member Muhammad Fannoush is now driving this initiative with some young people who were also involved with Mr. Nabbous while he was alive. The delay in the launch of this initiative is apparently related to problems in gaining access to a transmitter.

5 Findings

The needs of media identified by the IMS team in dialogue with north-eastern Libyan media actors are as follows:

1. There is an outspoken need for professionalisation of the media, for training in basic journalistic skills, awareness of journalistic standards and ethics, and setting up financially sustainable media businesses
2. Building local capacity to address the needs of the media sector – effectively, training of trainers
3. Building an institutional framework for future training and professionalisation of the media which also ensures local ownership
4. Drafting of media legislation and structural building of the media sector
5. Need for equipment and technical support
6. Need for support to the new independent media and media activists to organise themselves

6 Recommendations

International partnership mission: IMS calls for an international partnership mission to Libya by fall 2011. The task to support the media environment in north-eastern Libya is huge and diverse. The aim of the mission would be:

- a) to establish dialogue and coordination on outputs and develop an outline for a broad media sector programme in close cooperation with local media;
- b) to show strong international visibility in supporting independent media in Libya;
- c) to expose all critical issues for the development of free and fair media in Libya.

Support for institution building: An Independent Media Institute (potentially covering all of Libya) should be established. The term Media Institute is chosen to avoid confusion with the existing media centres.

Given the situation in Libya as a whole, IMS recommends that the process of building a Media Institute in Benghazi begins with as much involvement of media in the liberated cities as possible. The Media Institute in Benghazi should from the outset clearly be defined as a regional branch of a future national Libyan Media Institute. The process and structure developed in the liberated areas with Benghazi as the centre should serve as role model for a National Media Institute.

The Independent Media Institute could serve as the institutional framework for local capacity building (Training of Trainers), providing training for journalists and other media professionals, as well as facilitating and supporting the development of independent and professional media in Libya.

Training in basic journalism: The first phase of any training intervention should focus on the immediate improvement of the quality of media productions and of raising awareness of standards and ethics.

The second component would be training of trainers, building local capacity to professionalise media.

Also recommended is the training of editors by Arab trainers in editing/coaching and objective reporting to boost their capacity as the overall "gate-keepers" of their publications.

Immediate assistance: IMS recommends conducting safety training for journalists during the conflict

Roundtable: IMS recommends a roundtable between partners, local and international, active in the Benghazi media environment. The aim would be to initiate a discussion which would lead to a roadmap of how to transform, and indeed create a civil society structure, which can stabilise the nation – building on trust, reconciliation and mutual respect.

Documenting Libyan history: Several of the media visited by IMS have already begun the process of documenting the revolution. However, support is needed for the documentation process to record evidence that holds future governments accountable.

Drafting of media legislation: The director of media in the LTC, Muhammed Fannoush, has asked for support in how to structure a Media Ministry and write media legislation, code of press ethics etc. As the situation grows more stable in the country, the need for this type of support will also grow.

Provision of technical support: There is a major need for technical support and the potential for an independent printing facility should be explored.

Radio transmission is vital, and the lack of reach is apparent. A huge effort in supporting broadcast infrastructure is recommended by way of antennas, transmitters, amplifiers etc.

Assessment of community media: An assessment of the need for community media should be carried out.

Creative cooperation: Given the nature of the revolution and the cultural starvation of the Libyan people, there is a clear need for creative cooperation at many levels, such as between music (hip hop, rock and other music styles), caricature, graffiti or other popular art forms. The revolution is being expressed through many creative channels, and the new freedom is literally water in a desert.



Libyan youth calls for freedom.
Photo: Michael Irving Jensen/
IMS

7 Next steps

IMS will contact international organisations to assess if there is an interest in carrying out an international partnership mission to Libya.

IMS aims to establish a presence in Benghazi with the aim of furthering coordination amongst international and national media partners and to support the immediate needs of Libyan media.

For more information please contact the IMS Department for Middle East and North Africa on mij@i-m-s.dk or tel. +45 88327000.

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