THE NEW SYRIAN RADIO STATIONS

Appraisal, challenges and outlook

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Upon taking up the reins of power in 1963, the Ba'ath party imposed a state of emergency and turned Syria into a single-party state. Hafez Al-Assad's military coup in 1970 reinforced the authoritarian system that was already in place. Fundamental freedoms are systematically flouted and the population has been made subject to constant surveillance.

The government uses the media to consolidate and increase its control, outlawing all communications that deviate from the singular Ba'athist ideology. Only government-backed media outlets are authorised to operate: a press agency (the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)), a television channel, a radio station and three newspapers. At local level, each of the 14 governorates has its own radio station and newspaper, which are controlled by the local governors. They all broadcast the authorities' propaganda.

The first media revolution took place in 1995 with the introduction of satellite, opening a window to the world for Syrians. Following the death of Hafez Al-Assad, under the pretence of relaxing restrictions and promoting openness, the first private media organisations were permitted. However, they were placed under virtually total state control, and only those close to the palace are able to gain access. The second major change was the arrival of the Internet. But once again, service providers are companies that are run by or affiliated to the government. On account of the blocking of websites, the monitoring of Internet use and the tracking of correspondence, Syrians wishing to access freely available, non-censored information have been forced to get around censorship by other methods, which are not readily accessible to the uninitiated.

In 2010, immediately prior to the Arab Spring, Syria was ranked 173rd out of 178 in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index[1]. Bashar Al-Assad appeared on the organisation's list of Predators of Press Freedom[2], and the country featured among the Enemies of the Internet[3].

The start of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt caused the security services to tighten their control over all of the media. In March 2011, peaceful protests in Syria were violently repressed and militants were arrested.

The few independent journalists remaining in Syria at the time were either arrested or killed. The rest have gone into exile. From May-June 2011, visas for foreign journalists became extremely difficult to get hold of. Activists and ordinary people overcame their fear and took to the streets, armed with their mobile telephones and cameras, to document the gatherings and their repression. As information activists, they were systematically targeted. In the absence of professional Syrian or foreign journalists, they were able to produce content on the ground that was sent to media channels all around the world. Media networks, committees and other centres were set up. Each city had at least one 'media office'. At one time, Aleppo had about 10 media agencies. In September 2013 Jameel Salou, the founding journalist of the Free Syria News Agency (FSNA), announced that the city of Raqqa had no less than 39 civilian media offices[4]. Very quickly, the first 'free' media started to materialise. Watan FM began broadcasting in summer 2011 in various districts of the capital and the first editions of *Souriatna* were distributed in late September. A few months later, militants from Al-Zabadani and Darayya launched *Oxygen* and *Enab Baladi*, respectively.

We are witnessing the emergence of a new generation of media figures in Syria: citizen-journalists – mainly men aged 18–30. "There are women, of course, but their numbers have been falling", lamented Lina Chawaf in November 2013, head of programmes at Radio Rozana at the time. Most have no formal training in journalism. Some have careers, some have had a university education, others not, some have money, others have none. "It wasn't a matter of social class or cultural background" said Chawaf[5].

The government-run media outlets continue to use rhetoric labelling the protestors as terrorists who are trying to destabilise the country. Meanwhile, the authorities are tightening their control over the Internet, aware of the fact that it serves as a means of expression, a space for publishing information aimed at Syrians and the

[1] http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2010,1034.html
[2] http://en.rsf.org/predators2010-03-05-2010,37235.html
[3] http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Internet_enemies.pdf
[4] http://www.scribd.com/doc/182004073/Journalism-in-Syria-impossible-job, p. 26
[5] http://www.scribd.com/doc/182004073/Journalism-in-Syria-impossible-job, p. 27

international audience, and a tool for mobilising and organising civil society. Arrests by the security services and the *Shabiha* are becoming a daily occurrence.

The militarisation of the conflict has resulted in a *de facto* division of the country, between one region controlled by the regular army and another, in the north, under the control of the Free Syrian Army. A wide range of media initiatives have emerged across all formats: newspapers, radio stations, websites and televisions are springing up from everywhere. Owing to the instability of the situation on the ground, most have decided to base themselves outside of Syrian territory. Turkey quickly became the rear base of these new media outlets, with Gaziantep serving as a hub. The country is an attractive location, not only for its geographical proximity to the so-called 'free' regions in the north of Syria, but also due to the policies of the Lebanese, Jordanian and Egyptian governments[6], which stand as an impediment to the pursuit of activities supporting the Syrian revolution in those countries.

Generally speaking, these media outlets act as a bulwark against Damascus propaganda. Mostly run by citizen-journalists without formal training in the principles of journalism, they often use revolutionary rhetoric, free from any semblance of objectivity, neutrality or impartiality. This is evident from the choice of vocabulary and the tone and visual identity utilised. In their attempts to cast themselves as fully in opposition, these 'revolutionary media' (unconsciously) mimic the approach of the regime they are standing against, establishing the dialectic of 'if you're not with us, you're against us'. In April 2013 a Syrian journalist announced, "*It is impossible to be independent nowadays. You cannot – and simply should not – be so".* There are exceptions, of course, but many now see themselves as 'guardians of the revolution', and endeavour to communicate the 'reality on the ground' to the world, free from the 'clichés' deployed by the foreign media. In April 2013 a trainer noted that "*many confuse revolution with journalism*"[7].

In the absence of 'neutral' foreign observers on the ground, alongside the physical war government-run (or -affiliated) media outlets and new media organisations are waging an information and disinformation war.

In addition, the image of and work carried out by citizen-journalists, and more generally by civilians engaged in information-supplying activities, are distorted by the involvement of combatants and their spokespersons in this information war. Each armed group has its own 'media team' composed of at least one photographer/cameraman tasked with filming the warfare and uploading the images to Facebook and/or YouTube. The aim is not only to document the conflict, but also to attract funding from potential financial backers.

More recently, the revolutionary fever has waned. "*These citizen-journalists have become increasingly professional and the quality of the content they produce has improved greatly. Some have acquired journalism skills; particularly in response to the needs of Arab and international news broadcasters*", said journalist Hala Kodmani at the Institut du monde arabe in Paris on 9 October 2013. This increase in professionalism is also the result of training sessions held by various NGOs. "*Media activism has become a source of income for many young people, a way of earning a living. Many work for both international and local news organisations".*

The proliferation of armed groups, the emergence and subsequent expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and the unilateral proclamation of autonomy in the three cantons with a majority population of Syrian Kurds along the Turkish-Syrian border (known as Rojava, or Western Kurdistan) in November 2013[8] have led to the dividing-up of the far corners of the territory, with borders constantly moving and alliances being forged and dissolved on the basis of where interests lie. These different groups attempt to impose their law on the population residing in the territory they are trying to rule. Armed with their own media, they also seek to control the work carried out by independent journalists. Rules are arbitrary and abuse is common. The moralisation of society is making the work of independent journalists, in particular women, more difficult every day. The al-Nusra Front's consolidation of power in the north of the country since late 2014 has resulted in the exile of a third wave of information activists. These security issues are compounded by deficiencies in equipment and technical faults, such as power cuts and the lack of land-based Internet.

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[6] Since the military coup of July 2013
[7] http://www.scribd.com/doc/182004073/Journalism-in-Syria-impossible-job, p. 29
[8] The three non-adjacent cantons are Kobanî/Ayn al-Arab, Afrin and Jazira/Hasakah. 'A Statement on the Declaration of the Interim Joint Administration in Kurdish Region in Syria', 16 November 2013, http://www.pydrojava.net/eng/index.php/pyd-statements/116-a-statement-by-the-executivecommittee-of-the-democratic-union-party, accessed 9 June 2014.

More than four years since it first broke out, the general consensus is that the conflict is set to continue and that the media have a role to play. But what is this role? This study aims to give a concise overview of the radio stations operating in Syria. By analysing the difficulties they face on a daily basis, we will learn about the challenges they currently face with a view to identifying the best ways of addressing future action areas. A number of points to consider have been outlined, both for the Syrian radio stations themselves, and for the organisations working to support them and their financial backers.

Section 1 – A concise overview of the new Syrian radio stations

A large number of radio stations have been launched since the uprising broke out in March 2011. In the absence of a study such as the one compiled by *Enab Baladi* on the print media[9], it is difficult to ascertain the number of radio initiatives with any degree of precision. However, an overview of the Syrian media landscape conducted by International Media Support in May 2014[10] placed the number of Syrian radio stations in operation at the time at around 20. This figure is constantly changing, as a number of broadcasters have folded owing to their funding being discontinued.

1- The construction of a radio landscape

a) *Background*

With a few notable exceptions, most radio stations were launched by civil society militants with no formal basic training in journalism, using their own resources. That was the case for Watan FM[11], the first new-generation station, which started broadcasting on FM in various districts of Damascus via transmitters smuggled into Syria. One of its founders, current managing director Dr Ubadah Al-Qaddri, is a doctor by trade.

Most stations initially began broadcasting in 2012 or 2013 via the Internet, however. A sense of revolutionary euphoria was in the air. These information activists could scarcely have imagined that the conflict would become so drawn out and extend to a geopolitical context that has gone far beyond Syria alone.

Although some stations were launched from Syria, most are the result of initiatives set up by activists – some who have only recently left the country, and others who have lived abroad for a longer period of time.

Their motivation is to get closer to people. Working as volunteers, these people were driven by a desire to express themselves and to give voice to 'the Syrian streets' after 40 years under a dictatorship. Radio was "the simplest, easiest way" for many people to achieve this, explains Sirwan Hussein, director of Arta FM, launched in July 2013. For Adnan Haddad of Hara FM[12], which started broadcasting in November 2013, it was the most effective solution for sending and receiving information owing to the lack of Internet access in the Aleppo region. Ahmad Al-Kaddour of Radio Alwan recalls that his station "was also seen as a means of controlling the opposition institutions at local level in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo"[13]. In the words of the director of Sout Raya, "we felt that we had to offer a professional source that could give an alternative to the official channels"[14]. In contrast, for SMART, radio was above all a way of 'reaching' regular army soldiers, who are often cut off from the world and the latest news, but are able to access radio frequencies via their walkie-talkies.

In the view of Enrico de Angelis, Syrian media researcher and specialist, "the decision to transmit information via radio is a response to specific needs. Firstly, after the Internet it is the cheapest broadcasting medium […]. Radio stations are also easier to manage than television channels or newspapers for their founders, who are mostly inexperienced journalists". He terms these initiatives 'reactionary' in so far as they are carried out "as part of a critical thought process regarding the revolution as a whole and the role played by the media" and that they "entail a return, albeit partial, to more traditional journalist and media practices that predate the revolt"[15].

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[9] http://www.enabbaladi.org/archives/32670
[10] Study not published
[11] http://watan.fm/
[12] http://hara.fm/
[13] Radio Alwan was launched in April 2013. http://www.alwan.fm/
[14] http://www.moyenorient-presse.com/?p=1476 (p. 47)
[15] http://www.moyenorient-presse.com/?p=1476 (p. 45)

b) Radio pluralism?

The multitude of new Syrian radio stations may be distinguished by several key differences.

An initial line of distinction was quickly formed between stations that took a revolutionary stance and those that adopted a more neutral editorial line. Some broadcasters threw their full weight behind a movement supporting the revolution, which in turn made these stations supporters of the uprising; their decision was reflected by the composition of the range of programmes, the tone and terminology used by the station, the music played, etc. Others, such as Honey Al-Sayed of SouriaLi[16], have made it clear from the outset that they will refuse to act as the mouthpiece of a group or faction.

However, the prolongation of the conflict, with the end of the binary opposition between government forces and the Free Syrian Army, and the outbreak of 'armed opposition' with the arrival of Salafi-Jihadist bands and the emergence of a score of armed groups have led some radio stations to rethink their editorial line and soften their initial revolutionary stance. In the words of Lina Chawaf, "*Radio Rozana*[17] is aimed at all Syrians. We have to allow all Syrians viewpoints to be heard, regardless of whether they are in favour of the revolution or support the regime".

A further distinction must be made between stations with a local focus and those that have more 'national' ambitions. One such example is Radio Fresh[18], which broadcasts programmes based on regional news from Kafr Nabel, a town that has gained notoriety for its creative productions about the Syrian uprising. Until May 2014, Radio Alwan concentrated on Saraquib and the surrounding area. Hara FM and Aleppo Media Center[19], meanwhile, focus primarily on Aleppo. Arta FM[20]*,* the majority of whose programmes are broadcast in Kurdish, has erected transmitters exclusively in areas with majority-Kurdish populations (Amuda, Al-Qamishli, Al-Malikiyah/Dayrik, Ras al-Ayn/Sere Kaniye and more recently Ayn al-Arab/Kobanî), but also delivers news bulletins in Arabic, Syriac and Armenian in order to reach all the communities in these territories. These 'local' stations adopt a smaller-scale approach. Conversely, others such as Hawa SMART, Radio Orient, Radio Al-Kul, Radio ANA, Radio Rozana and Souriali are much broader in scope.

In addition, there are differences in content between stations with programmes that focus on social issues and those that dedicate more of their time to producing news bulletins. It should be pointed out that the qualifier used by listeners when speaking about their radio station is '*mujtama'iya*', which means 'society-related' and, by extension, 'community', rather than the adjective '*ijtima'iya*' which means 'social'. The term 'community radio' is liable to cause confusion, however, as very few stations are community radio stations in the strictest sense, i.e. are subject to "community ownership and control"[21]. A further distinction can be made between news stations and so-called 'social' stations, which produce programmes based more on Syrian identity and culture, and eyewitness accounts from people living in Syria "focusing on the cultural and social aspect of news"[22]. Nevertheless, this line of distinction is not rigid: most radio stations that class themselves as 'social' also produce news.

The new director of Radio Al-Kul[23] decided to take a gamble by turning it into a news-only station "so that everyone who switches on their radio can receive regular newsflashes". Others concentrate on Syrian society, such as Radio Alwan, Radio Fresh, Hara FM, Sout Raya and Nasaem Syria[24], which styles itself as a social link[25], notably give airtime to women through its programme *Barnamej Al-Mara'*. Enrico de Angelis has noted that even Radio Ana[26], which focuses primarily on war journalism, displays 'social radio' tendencies. Radio Rouh[27]

[16] https://www.facebook.com/RadioSouriaLi
[17] http://rozana.fm/
[18] https://www.facebook.com/Radio.Fresh.90.00FM
[19] https://www.facebook.com/AleppoMediaCenter5
[20] http://arta.fm/
[21] http://www.amarc.org/?q=node/47
[22] http://www.moyenorient-presse.com/?p=1476
[23] http://www.radioalkul.com/
[24] http://www.nasaem-syria.fm/
[25] *wassila ijtima'iya*
[26] http://www.ana.fm/ar/
[27] http://www.radiorooh.com/

targets a young demographic. Hawa SMART[28], meanwhile, is a service-based station; its programme *Kif Al-Tariq* provides specific information on road conditions, checkpoint locations and the border situation with Turkey[29].

In the early days, most programmes were pre-recorded, largely owing to broadcasting restrictions, but nowadays most programmes are transmitted live, with the obvious exception of those that require a sound editing.

It should be stressed that the various radio stations have made significant progress since they were first launched, in terms of both the content and the quality of their programmes. A number of commentators have noted the existence of real pluralism in the radio broadcasts available – with a genuinely diverse range of programmes on offer – and have praised the creativity of the teams. We should not overlook the fact that most of these stations were launched only three years ago. Enrico de Angelis makes the point, however, that the programmes are starting to becoming more similar in format and feature increasing amounts of social content – "this is a reflection of the policies adopted by the international community, and has resulted in a plethora of programmes supporting the reconstruction of civil society".

The head of the European Union delegation to Syria, which finances several media projects, believes there is a need for more studies, in particular on the Syrian media landscape and on the audience, in order to give a (general) answer to the issue of whether the new media are genuinely pluralistic in nature, and on their reach. "The European Union is currently funding a study in this area, which is designed to be as inclusive as possible and to ensure the most rigorous methodology is followed".

c) *Structuring work and increasing teams' professionalism*

Because of Syria's security situation, as well as that of a number of other countries in the region (Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt), most radio stations are now based in either Gaziantep or Istanbul in Turkey. Despite this, some still only produce and broadcast programmes locally, such as Radio Fresh in Kafr Nabel, Aleppo Media Center in Aleppo*,* and Arta FM, which has its head office in Amuda and broadcasts in two of the three cantons of the self-proclaimed autonomous region of Rojava. Radio Rozana's head office is in Paris. SouriaLi's team, on the other hand, has no specific geographical base. "We use Skype for our office", states Honey Al-Sayed, co-founder of the station; she herself is based in the United States. Regardless of how close they are to Syria in geographical terms, a large part of their work depends on a network of correspondents on the ground. Some have an exclusivity agreement, while others are freelancers paid by the job.

The teams, initially composed of militants with no journalistic experience whatsoever, are also becoming more professional. Although most of the founders of the radio stations are not professional journalists, they have surrounded themselves with experienced professionals, especially from the radio industry. What is more, whether they are based in Syria or overseas, most of their collaborators have undertaken training programmes. Significant investments have been made by the various financial backers to increase the professionalism of radio stations on the ground and in the editorial office. To that effect, a number of training courses have been held on the basic rules of journalism, and also on how to compose stories for the radio featuring modules on sound recording and writing for the radio.

The various companies in the private sector contracted by the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilisation Operations (CSO)[30] have set up training programmes aimed at radio stations supported by the US Department of State, and have provided broadcasters with equipment and financial support. That was the case for the Qatari-British company Access Research Knowledge, better known by its acronym ARK[31], and its subcontractor the Syrian NGO Basma. CSO subsequently awarded this contract to Creative Associates International[32]. Creative[33] initially

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[28] https://www.facebook.com/hawasmartradio
[29] https://soundcloud.com/hawa-smart/15-2-2015a
[30] http://www.state.gov/j/cso/releases/other/2013/206410.htm
[31] ARK did not respond to the request for an interview submitted on 11 June 2015.
[32] http://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/
[33] CREATIVE failed to respond to the request for an interview submitted on 4 June 2015. Its contract has just been renewed until September 2015.

supported ten radio stations and two television channels. One of the radio stations ceased operations in 2014; as a result, only nine remain under the support programme. The basic training on journalistic techniques developed into mentoring in the editorial office. While ARK bore the cost of the transmitters[34], Global News Intelligence (GNI) was awarded the rights to oversee mentoring activities until February/March 2015. Another company has since taken over the responsibility for enhancing the radio stations' skills. All the individuals interviewed stressed that ARK and Creative had no say in the stations' editorial content, unlike Basma with the print media. According to information received, there is set to be a rethink in the near future of all the support systems set up for Syria by the US Department of State, in particular those concerning the media.

Besides the US Department of State, a number of institutions actively support the training of Syrian radio stations. In that regard, since 2012 the European Union has backed several projects, either through the European instrument for democracy and human rights or under the European Neighbourhood Policy, with a view to enhancing and reinforcing the skills of the new Syrian media, in particular in the area of complying with journalistic rules and increasing teams' professionalism. The EU Member States have also provided support, and some have come up with solutions to these issues.

Moreover, significant internal structuring work has been undertaken by the radio stations towards becoming fully fledged media organisations. While the internal organisational hierarchy of each media outlet differs from one to the next, in general the directors – usually the head of programming – draw up the programme schedule, which then changes in line with developments on the ground. Editorial meetings are held with varying degrees of regularity. In most stations, someone is in charge of liaising with correspondents and coordinating their work. These key individuals send their stories to their respective editorial teams, who are then tasked with checking the content and editing them. It may take several rounds of back-and-forth communication before a story is completely validated and broadcast. This same schematic operating principle between editorial team and correspondents on the ground is used across the different radio stations, whether they are based in Syria, Turkey or further from the region. One important point to note is that, for stations based in Syria, physical contact is employed between editorial teams and their correspondents, whereas such meetings are rarer for those based outside of the country. Despite this, the Internet (when access is available) makes it possible to overcome many of the difficulties inherent to the current situation in Syria.

While most of the people working for these radio stations were initially volunteers, that is no longer the case today, as major financial backers lend their support to radio projects. Generally speaking, this has undoubtedly served as a huge incentive for the people who make up the teams.

d) *Towards a structuring of the radio sector?*

At their own initiative, in early 2014 14 Syrian radio stations signed a code of ethics and professional conduct 'specific to independent Syrian radio stations'[35]. This code defines the nature of the relationship between these media outlets and society. It stipulates their rights and responsibilities and reaffirms the principles of credibility and objectivity. The code serves as the common working framework for the new Syrian radio stations.

Subsequently, six stations – Ana, Arta FM, Hara FM, Radio Alwan, Sout Raya and Nasaem Syria, most of which are based in Gaziantep – decided to set up the ABRAJ network[36]. Launched in November 2014, ABRAJ was registered in Turkey in March 2015. Nasaem Syria decided to withdraw in May of that year. Established through a Syrian initiative, the aim of the network is to promote synergy between its various members by fostering exchanges with joint productions and maximising the means available to each station.

According to information received, some financial backers would like to see ABRAJ expand to incorporate new radio stations.

2 – The stations' broadcasting methods or the importance of FM

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[34] According to several editors-in-chief, ARK has continued to provide the radio stations with funding for the production of particular programmes, including Radio Alwan's forthcoming broadcast, which is aimed specifically at women.
[35] http://www.almodon.com/media/1f5028c2-e61f-4307-8c9c-64e8586af81c
[36] http://www.abrajsy.org/

For financial and technical reasons, most Syrian radio stations started out by broadcasting via the Internet, with the exception of Watan FM and its network of 20 transmitters that were installed in various districts of Damascus in summer 2011. Syria's online audience is limited, however, owing to unequal levels of access to the Internet in the country. Satellite radio is far from widespread in terms of listeners, especially as it is at the mercy of power cuts. In view of these circumstances, it soon became essential for stations to broadcast on FM in order to be heard by Syrians in the so-called 'liberated' northern regions of the country. This has given rise to a degree of competition between the stations which is not necessarily positive.

a) *Sharing frequencies: an initial requirement*

Sharing frequencies quickly became a necessity for both economic and logistical reasons. For a long time, it was the only solution available to the majority of radio stations in order for them to be able to broadcast on FM, before larger amounts of funding enabled them to obtain their own transmitter and frequency.

- *The SMART/Hawa SMART experiment*

The Association for the Support of Free Media (ASML)[37], registered in France in November 2011 – in collaboration with its Syrian partner organisation SMART, which is responsible for technical implementation – has supported a number of radio stations, namely SMART (Hawa SMART), Al-Assima Online (before it became Al-Assima) and Radio Al-Kul, providing all three with equipment, funding and FM transmission means. SouriaLi has merely entered into a broadcasting agreement.

SMART's initial idea was to create a network of FM radio stations using transmitters under its ownership, with a content platform available to all. The project failed to take off: in November 2012 Sinan Hatahet, co-founder of the organisation and head of the Syrian National Council's media office, created Radio Al-Kul. Since 15 March 2013, this station, which was initially supported by SMART and subsequently by the Coalition, has been broadcast over SMART transmitters alongside Al-Assima, which was previously only available via the Internet. On 1 January 2014, SMART launched its own radio station and began broadcasting SouriaLi's programmes.

These four stations subsequently agreed to share the same frequency, with Hawa SMART occupying the largest section of broadcasting hours (eight hours of programming), leaving six hours open for the other three stations. In October 2014, the new director of Radio Al-Kul, Yasser Kherallah, decided to withdraw from this initiative. Hawa SMART is currently planning to review its programming to increase visibility and coherence[38].

According to Chamsy Sarkis, it has been possible to listen to these stations on FM in Damascus since March 2013 through a transmitter in Ghouta (on 103.2 FM) and in Homs, Hama and the south of Idlib, through a transmitter in the south of Idlib (99.8 FM)[39]. Transmitters have now been installed in Aleppo and Raqqa. In winter 2013-14, the Raqqa transmitter was transferred to Deir ez-Zor, and new ones were erected in the Latakia region and the north of the Idlib province. The next goal is to cover the Aleppo region.

- *The SYRNET experiment*

The German cooperation agency, Media in Cooperation & Transition (MICT) was behind the September 2013 launch of the Syria Radio Network initiative (SYRNET)[40], the aim of which is to "diversify the information sources on the airwaves and help media producers increase their professionalism"[41].

The principle of the SYRNET project is similar to that of SMART: frequencies shared by different radio stations, divided up into time slots, which are selected on the basis of availability and change every six months. Every day, the stations provide several hours of programming which are then broadcast over the airwaves. SYRNET transmitters are mobile and only MICT knows their location.

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[37] https://www.facebook.com/medialibre.fr
[38] Discussions were ongoing as this report was being compiled.
[39] The transmitter was damaged in late 2014. Repairs are currently being carried out (interview of 7 June 2015).
[40] http://www.syrnet.org/
[41] http://www.mict-international.org/projects/syrnet-syrian-radio-network/

SYRNET currently broadcasts programmes from stations including Rozana FM, Radio Rooh, Radio Al-Assima, Hara FM, Nasaem Syria and Sout Raya[42].

- *The CFI–IMS initiative*

An initiative has recently been launched by CFI, the French media cooperation agency, and International Media Support. Backed by European Union funding, IMS, an implementing partner of the Syrian Media Incubator project, has entered into a contract with the Emirati company Broadcast Systems Arabia[43] to allow several radio stations to be broadcast on FM in the north of Syria from 1 June 2015. Radio Rozana, Radio Fresh and Aleppo Media Center are also available on 99.3 FM. Radio Rozana takes up eight hours of broadcasting time, from 12 noon to 7 p.m., and the other stations divide up the remaining six hours of transmission time. Negotiations are currently being held with other radio stations[44].

b) *Broadcasting via unique frequencies – for enhanced visibility and development*

Some radio stations own one or more transmitters, and therefore have their own unique frequencies. Stations such as Radio Orient were quick off the mark in acquiring the financial means they needed to broadcast directly via a unique frequency (97.2 FM). Others were forced to wait for the arrival of overseas funding before they were able to broadcast on FM via their own transmitter(s). That was the case for, among others, Nasaem Syria (which can be found on 98.5 FM in Aleppo and the surrounding area), Radio Ana (90 FM in Aleppo and the surrounding area), Arta FM (99.5 FM in Amuda, Al-Qamishli, Al-Malikiyah/Dayrik, Ras al-Ayn/Sere Kaniye and more recently Ayn al-Arab/Kobanî), Hara FM (106.5 MHz in Aleppo and the surrounding area), Radio Alwan (92.3 and 93.3 FM in the Idlib and Aleppo areas), Sout Raya (89.8 FM in the north of the country), Watan FM (90.3, 90.2, 90.03 FM in Aleppo and the surrounding area)*,* Radio Al-Kul (95.5 FM in the north of the country), or Radio Fresh (90 MHz in Kafr Nabl).

These radio stations mainly cover the regions in northern Syria, but they are all planning to soon extend their coverage to the regions in the south of the country.

Four different broadcasting models are employed by the new Syrian radio stations:
- stations that only broadcast using their own transmitter and therefore have a single, unique frequency;
- stations that broadcast their FM programmes only using shared frequency networks such as SMART, SYRNET or more recently the CFI–IMS initiative. Some stations broadcast via several shared frequency systems;
- stations that opt for a combination of the two: via their own transmitters and shared frequency;
- stations that broadcast exclusively via the Internet and/or via satellite.

Moreover, since they were first launched, most radio stations have been willing to exchange content. One notable example is SouriaLi and Radio Alwan, but it is far from exceptional. Further evidence of this philosophy is given by the fact that a number of stations carry branded programmes for the pan-Arab station Radio Al-Aan.

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[42] https://www.facebook.com/syriaradionetwork/info?tab=page_info. According to information received, however, Yasmeen Al-Sham appears to have stopped broadcasting.
[43] http://www.broadcastarabia.com/
[44] Information valid on 15 June 2015

Section 2 – Difficulties inherent to the Syrian situation

1) Radio – a Syrian medium?

A number of analysts and observers from Syrian society, including journalists themselves, have insisted that radio was not a 'Syrian cultural medium' prior to the 2011 uprising. "People used to listen to the radio in the car or in shops, if the radio set had yet to be replaced by a television", recalls a journalist. There is scope for debate, therefore, over the impact of the current conflict on listening habits in Syria. Have the war and the restrictions it has placed on equipment altered the ways in which Syrians access information?

The study carried out by MICT, which was published in August 2014[45], shows that generally speaking, the main source of information used by Syrians, regardless of where they live or are currently located, is television, followed by the Internet[46]. Radio is used to obtain information by 54.2% of Syrians in 'government-controlled areas', as opposed to 51.7% in 'contested regions/regions under the control of the rebels'. However, as one Syrian journalist noted, radio seems to play a more important role in Kurdish-majority regions of Syria, as compared with the rest of the country.

Nevertheless, radio stations have received more funding than any other project, especially from the US Department of State. This led the journalist Hala Kodmani to declare, in March 2015, that radio projects are the most wasteful financially – an opinion that was shared by the weekly publication *Souriatna* in its article of 1 April 2015 entitled 'Syrian radio stations: unknown investors and zero auditors'[47]. This investment in the radio sector also raises another legitimate question. Is providing Syrians access to free, uncensored information the sole motivation?

The radio stations are now confronted with the challenge of satisfying their audience and meeting their listeners' information needs. In order to achieve these targets, they must analyse their audience and its programming expectations.

2) Existential crisis and disconnect with reality

Irrespective of how they are funded, the new Syrian media outlets are undergoing a kind of existential crisis. Their role, and particularly that of the radio stations, has changed since 2011. Keen supporters of the revolution, they then took it upon themselves to convince the undecided, while establishing themselves as the watchdog of the revolutionary forces, in order to support the democratisation efforts of the institutions of the future Syria. Since mid-2013, they have promoted the values of peace and tolerance, in order to combat radicalisation, confessionalism and rise of extremism. Nowadays, although this ambition is the most prevalent, many radio stations are no longer able to imagine how they can achieve it and even question the extent to which it is realistic. This should be regarded as completely normal given the current situation in Syria. It is vital that editorial teams think carefully about their goal and their audience in order to make the content of their programmes as suitable as possible.

This questioning reflex is all the stronger since the radio stations and their teams are geographically isolated from events in Syria. This disconnect is a fact, not a criticism. For security reasons, but also in the interest of technical and logistical ease, most of these stations have decided to base their editorial team outside of Syria, while retaining a network of correspondents on the ground. Only Radio Fresh, Arta FM and more recently Aleppo Media Center have kept their entire team within the country. Daily contact is maintained with the inside, and some editors-in-chief and journalists have continued to embark on missions in the country. Nevertheless, physical separation is a reality, which has resulted in a certain disconnect in news reports with the priorities of Syrians within the country.

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[45] Carried out in January 2014, before the beginning of ISIS's territorial expansion in summer 2014.

[46] http://www.mict-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/syrienstudie_20140813.pdf

[47] http://syrian-reporter.net/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9%D8%8C-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D9%84/

3) Lack of transparency in funding

The lack of long-term funding is a major handicap for the radio stations. According to researcher Enrico de Angelis, some stations, e.g. Baladna and Yasmeen Al-Sham, have been forced to cease broadcasting as a result.

The contracts between Creative, currently the main financial backer, and the radio stations supported by the US Department of State are three–four months in length. That prevents the stations from planning ahead and organising their work for the long-term.

What is more, the lack of transparency in funding clearly gives rise to unhelpful competition between the different stations. It is very difficult to foster cohesion and a spirit of solidarity under these conditions.

4) Production under outside influence

a) *The impact on editorial line of securing transmitters*

While some radio station directors deny all links with armed groups on the ground, many acknowledge that they pragmatically enter into such relationships in order to protect their transmission antennas. Not all of them openly admit that these relationships have an impact on their editorial line, but plenty concede that they are a necessity, not only for the safety of their equipment, but also that of their correspondents.

b) *The crucial issue of correspondents' safety*

Aware of the precarious situation on the ground for their correspondents, many radio stations avoid discussing certain issues, focusing on particular armed groups or citing specific examples. Chamsy Sarkis, head of ASML/SMART, admits that Hawa SMART teams rarely (if ever) address certain issues which are deemed to be too sensitive. He gives the example of the al-Nusra Front Islamic court, which "for obvious security reasons" the broadcaster refuses to interview. Watan FM's directors claim that no issue is off limits, but omit the name of the correspondent when a potentially sensitive programme is broadcast. "No issues are banned on Sout Raya; we make every effort to remain objective and true to the facts", states Firas Fayyad. Radio Al-Kul adopts the same editorial policy.

To avoid problems, Radio Rozana now uses pseudonyms for all its correspondents, not just for those based in regions controlled by the regime. Moreover, correspondents based in government- or ISIS-controlled territories send their stories to the head office in Paris, where they are then recorded. Reem Halab of Nasaem Syria discloses that in some areas the correspondent's voice is altered so that it is not identifiable when the programme is aired. Some Hawa SMART correspondents have gone as far as announcing on their Facebook page that they are no longer working with the station, in an attempt to divert attention and release some of the pressure. We can only speculate as to how much room for manoeuvre is available to the stations that broadcast in the Rojava region.

Owing to the pressure exerted by the armed groups, some correspondents have gone into exile.

c) *Social pressure (real or perceived)*

- The Syrian situation and journalistic conduct

The notion of 'respect for the suffering of Syrians who still live on the inside' is at the forefront of the concerns of most of the journalists interviewed. It affects the editorial line, tone and terminology employed by the stations. Some editorial teams actively discuss the semantic wording to be used over the airwaves.

Zoya Bostan of Hawa SMART acknowledges the ethical dilemma currently posed by the use of the term 'martyrs' instead of 'killed'. "We chose the term 'martyr' because it has the connotation of 'dying for a cause'. We felt that the term 'killed' was too sugar-coated." She eloquently adds, "We took into consideration the feelings of Syrians, even though it was unprofessional to do so". Chamsy Sarkis outlines the dichotomy

between radio and the print media: the term 'martyr' is used over the airwaves, but is replaced by 'killed' when used by a press agency. Radio Al-Kul takes the opposite approach.

Lina Chawaf explains that Radio Rozana does not use the term 'martyr' over the airwaves, although she recalls having trouble imposing this rule on her teams in the beginning. She goes on to say, however, that "we are aware that it is a sensitive subject for the population. In addition, we make every effort not to use the term 'killed', replacing it with other expressions". Sout Raya, on the other hand, does use the term 'killed' "in the interests of professionalism and objectivity", remarks Firas Fayyad.

In the same vein, some people have debated what name should be given to the self-proclaimed autonomous 'Rojava' region, fearing that by using this term they would be acknowledging the existence of a Syrian Kurdistan and confirming the de facto partition of the country. One journalist stressed that "use of the term Rojava is clearly a political choice. It betrays an obvious bias". The same dilemma arises regarding the names of Kurdish cities. Lina Chawaf of Radio Rozana makes the following distinction: "We always give both names, Arabic and Kurdish, together. For example, we say 'Kobanî/Ayn al-Arab'".

The choice of which term to use when referring to the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant is also far from straightforward. While some media outlets use the whole expression in the interests of respecting journalistic ethics, others opt for the Arabic acronym 'Daesh', which has a negative connotation. In contrast, others employ the term 'al-Dawla' (which means 'state' in Arabic), which hints at a modicum of support for ISIS.

- *Growing moralisation*

Some stations have gone as far as to create religious programmes in an attempt to influence potential supporters of the al-Nusra Front and ISIS on the ground, by inviting religious leaders to 'subtly' deconstruct their ideology. One such broadcaster is Al-Kul, which has a daily programme and two weekly transmissions on the theme.

Music policy is also based on morality. Singers who have a reputation for being too pro-regime are strictly prohibited on some frequencies. Reem Haleb of Nasaem Syria recalls that "music programming is scheduled in such a way that Syrians on the inside feel that we are in touch with their needs and priorities".

The al-Nusra Front has threatened a number of stations for continuing to broadcast women's voices over the airwaves, and even for playing music at all.

5) The complex issue of broadcasting

a) *Technical restrictions*

For financial and technical reasons, most radio stations have started broadcasting online. However, Syria's online audience is limited. Internet access is stable, especially in government-controlled areas, where 78% of the population are able to connect (according to the MICT study). However, it is also controlled and filtered[48] by the Syrian Telecommunications Establishment (STE)[49], under the authority of the Ministry for Telecommunications and Technology, which has blocked access to the websites of virtually all of these new radio stations.

In the north of the country, owing to the destruction wrought by the combat and the cutting-off of communications in some parts of the territory, access is scarce and fluctuates by area: the Turkish network can be picked up near the border (including in the region governed by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the main Syrian Kurdish political power) and physical cables have been extended from Turkey to the major cities in the north via Azaz for the Aleppo region and via Sarmada for the Idlib region. In addition, satellite relay points have been installed in local council buildings, a number of cultural centres and battalion headquarters. Access

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[48] http://12mars.rsf.org/2014-en/2014/03/11/syria-online-tracking-is-a-family-affair/
[49] http://www.ste.gov.sy/

remains problematic. The same applies to ISIS-controlled regions, where information on the population's Internet access is contradictory.

It should be noted that the main source of news for Syrians with Internet access is Facebook (as in many other countries), rather than news sites or, much less, the radio stations' websites. They will therefore only be able to access radio content if they have 'liked' the page, which will then filter into their newsfeed – composed of information posted by trusted contacts or media outlets they are 'following'.

Many radio stations are also broadcast via satellite (by virtue of agreements with Creative, Radio Netherlands Worldwide or SYRNET). Despite this, few Syrians listen to the radio via this medium. People with both an electricity supply and satellite access tend to prefer to watch satellite news channels rather than listen to satellite radio stations with no pictures.

In view of these circumstances, it became essential for the radio stations to broadcast via frequency modulation. Nowadays, although some stations are only broadcast over the Internet or via satellite, there is competition for presence on the airwaves in order to reach the target population: Syrians living in Syria.

As mentioned above, many stations had no choice but to share a frequency. However, frequency-sharing initiatives – namely those run by SMART, SYRNET or more recently CFI–IMS – make it difficult for radio stations to project their brand and retain listener loyalty. For that reason, Yasser Kherallah took the decision to no longer broadcast Radio Al-Kul via SMART or SYRNET transmitters. At the same time, several editors-in-chief have stressed that these initiatives enable them to have a presence on FM in places where it would not otherwise be possible. Nowadays, those that have sufficient financial capacity seem to prefer having their own frequency while optionally maintaining a presence on a shared network.

b) _Geographically unequal, limited FM coverage_

As a result of the conflict and the fragmentation of the territory, unlike the government-controlled radio stations, none of the new stations covers all of Syria. The uneven distribution of these new stations' transmitters across the country as a whole, and the resulting unequal access to these FM stations for Syrians, are all too apparent. Only the northern areas are (partially) covered. It is extremely difficult to reach the populations located in some of the government-controlled areas on the coast, in particular in the Tartus region, which is a long way from the areas controlled by the non-governmental armed groups. Further north, the government-controlled city of Latakia is reached by transmitters installed on the peaks of Jisr Al-Shughur. In Damascus, only Hawa SMART is currently accessible on FM[50], as Watan FM suspended its broadcasts in early 2015. Its director claims that it will be back on the airwaves by June 2015 at the latest[51].

In the ISIS-controlled areas in the east of the country, it is practically impossible for the radio stations to broadcast on FM. In Raqqa, the only one to do so is ISIS radio Al-Bayan FM[52]. Watan FM is planning to install a 2500-Watt transmitter in the Idlib region with a view to reaching the populations living in the Raqqa province.

By contrast, the south is left out of the equation. However, a number of stations intend to install antennas in the Daraa region in the near future in order to provide coverage to the south of the country.

What is more, owing to the fragmented nature of the country, the stations' coverage is geographically limited. Some broadcast in several different parts of the territory, often non-continuously over a given area, whereas others only operate in a single location. Radio Fresh can thus be picked up in Kafr Nabel, Arta FM in two of the three cantons of Rojava and Aleppo Media Center in Aleppo. When it started, Radio Alwan only broadcast in Saraqib and its surrounding area. 'Coverage area' differs from one station to the next, depending on the strength of the transmitters, the quality of the antennas and the lie of the land in which the equipment is installed.

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[50] On 15 June 2015. _Al-Assima_ did not respond to requests for information.
[51] Interview of 16 June 2015
[52] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-7i4ZzFm_0

c) <u>*Unstable transmissions*</u>

One of the problems faced by the radio stations is the lack of a stable FM signal.

- <u>*Technical restrictions*</u>

The lack of a stable frequency is partly due to the lack of a stable Internet connection. Transmitting the signal via satellite has improved FM transmission. Power cuts represent a further technical and equipment restriction to the efficient transmission and reception of the radio signal.

In view of the regular power cuts and the fact that most of the population has no access to a generator, even on a shared basis, with the support of Basma a number of media outlets have distributed manually rechargeable radio sets to enable Syrians to listen to the radio if they do not have an electricity supply.

- <u>*Security restrictions*</u>

This lack of stability is also the result of the security situation on the ground. Transmitters are liable to be destroyed by bombing campaigns by the regular Syrian army. For that reason, some media outlets have decided to position their transmitters near the front lines or close to the Turkish border, assuming that the Syrian army would not be willing to bomb the areas under its control or that of its neighbour.

In addition, these same transmitters are sometimes confiscated by the armed groups, e.g. those belonging to Sout Raya in the Latakia province in late 2013. Radio Rozana's broadcasting equipment was seized by the al-Nusra Front in Idlib in late 2014 and the person responsible for installing them was arrested for several days. In April 2015 Radio Alwan's transmitter in Saraqib was also confiscated by the al-Nusra Front[53]. That is why no one knows the location of the Radio Al-Kul transmitter in Idlib, whereas in Aleppo the station's office is 200 metres from the headquarters of the armed group. Nasaem Syria was forced to close its office in Aleppo in early 2014 following the arrival of ISIS and the arrest of one of its correspondents.

On 18 February 2014, the self-appointed Rojava authorities ordered Arta FM to cease broadcasting its news bulletins. The ban was lifted two days later, following decisive international mobilisation[54]. It should be pointed out that all stations wishing to broadcast in the Rojava territory must receive authorisation from the Union of Free Media (Yekîtiya Ragihandina Azad, or YRA), based in Al-Qamishli[55]. This self-styled independent association is actually controlled by the main political power in the region, the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Reporters Without Borders has gone as far as to class the YRA as a fledgling Ministry of Information[56].

It should also be stressed that most stations based in Turkey do not have the requisite legal documentation to carry out their activities in the country. They are undertaking the necessary steps to obtain the permits in question, but the extremely delicate nature of the situation cannot be understated. It affects the stability of the teams and the editorial office's ability to make long-term plans.

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[53] http://www.abrajsy.org/en/news-events/alwan-fm-silenced-in-idleb/
[54] http://www.freemedia.at/newssview/article/update-ban-on-syrian-stations-news-reports-lifted.html
[55] https://www.facebook.com/YRA.FreeMedia
[56] http://en.rsf.org/syria-how-kurdistan-s-pyd-keeps-the-01-05-2014,46221.html

Section 3 – Challenges that the radio stations must overcome

The following challenges are action areas that need to be addressed to enhance the role of the radio stations in the future.

1) A much-needed period of introspection

A reflection process needs to take place on the role of the new Syrian media in today's world, in view of the fact that this form of media is not a Syrian cultural medium and is only able to reach a small part of the country and its population. Do these stations see themselves as neutral commentators on national and international news? Do they consider themselves to be agents of reconciliation and Syrian unity? Or as activists on the ground, engaged in activities that transcend the media sphere, e.g. Arta FM and its football team whose shirts are emblazoned with the station's name[57]? Do they believe they can serve as a nexus for the efforts made by the various civil society organisations on the ground? Would they prefer to broaden their presence at local level or increase their coverage, or combine these two layers of action through a coordinated approach?

It is up to the individual radio stations to decide. The world is their oyster. A thorough reflection process for determining how best to meet the population's expectations will enable them to rework their programme schedule in line with their perceived future role.

2) The issue of audience(s)

a) Better understanding their audience(s)

All the radio stations interviewed affirmed that their main audience was Syrians living in Syria. But is this actually the case? Who are the current listeners of these stations? Syrians in Syria? If so, where in Syria? Syrians living abroad? In camps or in towns and cities? And what medium/media do they use to listen to the stations?

Fully aware of the technical and equipment restrictions on listening to the radio stations in Syria, financial backers have invested significant sums to enable them to broadcast on FM. Nevertheless, faced with limited penetration (and possibly listener) rates, a number of stations have decided to also establish a presence on the Internet in order to expand their audience to other parts of Syria, and to Syrians living in exile – with the exception of a few, namely Hawa SMART, Radio Fresh and Arta FM, among others, which have clearly opted for the FM route virtually to the complete exclusion of the Internet.

Most radio stations now have several different audiences:
1) Syrians from Syria, who listen on FM;
2) Syrians from Syria, who listen via the Internet or satellite;
3) Syrians from outside of Syria, who listen via the Internet or satellite (N.B. according to the UN Refugee Agency, there are almost 4 million Syrian refugees)[58].

These two media (FM and Internet) have different audiences, however, and do not therefore have the same information needs. "*You have to be able to strike a balance between the needs of listeners on the inside and those on the outside*", explains Yasser Kherallah of Radio Al-Kul. In his view, there is no such thing as Internet listeners, but rather consumers of audio and video content.

Most of the radio stations have thus developed a strategy for maintaining an online presence, with websites that make it possible to listen to the station and its programmes online, and to access extra content. Almost all of the stations have made their programmes available on SoundCloud. It is difficult to access SoundCloud in Turkey, however, explains Yasser Kherallah of Radio Al-Kul. Several smartphone applications have also been launched. To that effect, Basma created an Android application for all the Syrian radio stations in 2014. According to Ahmed Kaddour, Radio Alwan's audience can be defined in terms of before and after May 2014:

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[57] https://www.flickr.com/photos/artafm/sets/72157634726496754/
[58] http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

before, the radio targeted people living in Saraqib and more broadly in the Idlib province. Afterwards, when he was forced to leave for Istanbul, he developed a wider range of programming aimed at online listeners.

A great many programmes, developed by a number of radio stations with a view to reaching Syrians based abroad, discuss the issue of refugees and the difficulties they face. Nasaem Syria, Radio Souriali and Radio Rozana have all added this type of broadcast to their range of programmes.

Many station directors claim that they conduct regular studies on the programme quality and information needs through their offices or teams on the ground, or via surveys via WhatsApp or Viber. However, no truly independent collective study has yet been carried out. Undertaking a study of this nature on their audience would enable the stations to identify their strengths and weaknesses, as well as areas for development and improvement. In the view of the European Union Delegation to Syria's head of projects, an independent audience study involving as many of the institutions working in the field of supporting the Syrian media as possible would shed light on both Syrians' media consumption habits and their needs. It would also give an indication of the relative gap (if any) between the stated goals for the ongoing projects and the reality on the ground, as part of continued efforts to better assist the Syrian population and to make projects backed by the European Union as relevant as possible for them.

b) Towards improved listener loyalty

If the stations were to gain a thorough understanding of their audience, it would enable them to develop a coherent, standardised range of programmes, with clear, fixed news bulletins throughout the week, in contrast to weekend broadcasts, in order to encourage listener loyalty. In addition, music should not be overlooked.

Listener loyalty must be fostered alongside improvements to the stations' sound identity (theme tune, loop, jingles and sweepers), and by taking great care when writing their radio programmes and conducting interviews.

It is essential that the radio stations carry out this difficult, subtle balancing exercise.

c) The need to cater for a diverse audience

Radio stations that have opted for a presence on both the Internet and FM must ensure that their websites are fit for purpose by adapting content to make it suitable for the web and adding more multimedia content. The websites' visual identity must tie in with the sound identity of the corresponding station.

Once an online presence has been established, the stations must work to improve their web indexing and position on search engine listings. They also need to increase their responsiveness on social media, in particular Facebook, by introducing dedicated community management staff into the teams.

3) Enhancing the organisations' skills

Given the high turnover within the teams, the basic principles of journalism will always hold a particular importance; however, their needs have changed, and other areas need to be developed if they are to continue to enhance their skills. More specific, specialist training is now required to guide them along the path to excellence, in addition to gradually increased autonomy from the financial backers.

According to Tunisian expert Mohamed Al-Hani, who audited the ABRAJ network for CFI in May 2015, special attention needs to be paid to the radio stations' organisational structure, through the development of detailed organisational hierarchies, in addition to clearly defined positions and resulting responsibilities, with dedicated planning. Above all, he stresses the importance of the head of programming and editor-in-chief positions, and of dividing the editorial team into two sections – one responsible for administration and the other for content – to ensure that the stations are properly managed.

Most of the editorial teams interviewed complained of high turnover, in particular those based in Turkey, where many staff members were liable to depart for Europe or other destinations. The competition between the different media outlets is another very important factor, as pay scales are neither standardised nor (much less) harmonised. Retaining the loyalty of the journalists and correspondents who work for them is also a major challenge.

4) **Devising business models to enable the radio stations to operate independently of the financial backers**

It is becoming increasingly necessary for the radio stations to find alternative sources of funding other than their current investors, in order to gain autonomy and to start planning for the time when aid to the Syrian media will be cut or stopped. Many of them have long been devising a business model that would grant them this independence.

Radio stations currently have a slightly higher budget than print publications, owing to costs relating to equipment, hiring a frequency and/or arranging a subscription to a satellite. What is more, most of the stations are part of a media group, which is less common for the print media, with the exception of the women's magazine *Jasmine Syria,* a publication belonging to the ID group, which also comprises Nasaem Syria and Pixel Production. Within these groups, a radio station is only one of several projects alongside an online press and audio and video content production agency – these activities are easier to conduct as a number of tools can be shared.

The media outlets that make up SMART include Hawa SMART, SMART News Agency and SMART Production, to name but three. Hara FM is part of the Syrian Media Group[59] (alongside Lamba Media Production). Radio ANA falls under the ANA New Media Association group, which also includes ANA PRESS[60] and Palmyra Web Solutions. Sout Raya is part of the Raya Media Group[61], which also includes Soura Raya, a video and film production agency, among other organisations.

Selling content (news, audio, video, etc.) partly funds the radio stations' activities. Some have started cooperating with international humanitarian organisations, e.g. Lamba Media Production with Médecins sans frontières.

However, Mohamed Al-Hani stresses the importance for a number of press groups of separating the radio station from their other activities.

It is important that the various heads of the media organisations be encouraged to explore alternative forms of funding, in particular an opening-up to markets in countries with sizeable Syrian communities (e.g. Turkey), partnerships with television channels, paid advertising, Google ads, etc.

Skills must also be developed in the field of fund-raising and creating projects aimed at financial backers. In preparation for the post-conflict era, it is furthermore recommended that reflection and guidance workshops be held on the development of alternative economic models to reduce the media outlets' dependence on international investors.

5) **Towards the setting-up of more networks?**

The radio sector is highly competitive. For that reason, pragmatic concerns have led to the emergence of networks, initially in the form of 'broadcasting networks' such as SMART and SYRNET (and more recently CFI-IMS). Cross-station collaboration has also quickly started to occur, featuring the small-scale exchange of programmes as a result of individual initiatives.

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[59] http://syrianmediagroup.com/
[60] https://www.facebook.com/ANAPRESS.EN/timeline
[61] Site currently being finalised (5 July 2015).

In November 2014 six stations – Ana, Arta FM, Hara FM, Radio Alwan, Sout Raya and Nasaem Syria – decided to join forces to leave the ABRAJ network in order to improve cooperation between the members through joint productions and initiatives. According to a well-informed source, ABRAJ, which since May 2015 has only had five members, is currently undergoing difficulties. "The network has effectively ceased to exist. The stations are caught up in their own internal problems. They are finding it impossible to prioritise the group. One of the difficulties stems from the lack of financial means available to the network itself". However, this observer stresses that the problem can be overcome and underlines the intrinsic value of an initiative such as this, which is the result of a realisation of the importance of the group.

It may be possible to encourage other stations to develop their own networks in order to fortify themselves against the risk of disappearing.

Others emphasise the need for complementarity between local and more national radio stations. Given the current situation in Syria, some teams have opted for a local scope. However, this micro-localism, which is useful in so far as it meets needs on the ground, could have the adverse effect of sustaining, or even consolidating, the fragmentation of the country. In that regard, the setting-up of networks fostering complementarity at both local and national level could help – as far as possible – to avoid this pitfall.

Section 4 – A few areas to work on

1) For the Syrian media outlets

- Conduct a thorough reflection process on their role and audience(s);
- Strengthen existing groups through joint projects;
- Ensure that skills and competences are shared in order to benefit from economies of scale;
- Continue to enhance skills acquired in the field of journalistic objectivity.

2) For the media support organisations

- Ensure that cooperation between the various bodies providing support to the radio stations, and more generally the media, is efficient and effective;
- Carry out a study on the radio stations' audience that reflects the current situation in Syria as accurately as possible (and submit the results to the media outlets concerned);
- If necessary, help the media outlets to identify priorities from the results of the audience study;
- Continue to support the broadcasting of content, in particular in areas that are not currently covered;
- Set up training programmes that genuinely meet technical (sound engineering, sound design, organisation of playlists, etc.) or managerial needs, using specialist professionals;
- Provide guidance on site to best meet the needs of the media outlets concerned;
- Aim to help the Syrian media outlets become autonomous and independent from the financial backers by providing bespoke guidance on the subjects of fund-raising and project creation;
- Set up guidance and reflection workshops on developing economic models with a view to helping the media outlets to obtain greater financial independence from the international operators and financial backers.

3) For the financial backers

- Improve the transparency mechanisms of aid and support policies;
- Foster genuine cooperation between financial backers and operators as part of continued efforts to support the Syrian population as effectively as possible.