

Movie Script Egypt:

“The new Egyptian media law and its implications”

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The Egyptian parliament finally approved the new media law. However, only the institutional media law that was ratified in last December 2016.

According to the new law, the Ministry of Information was terminated and instead, and instead, three entities have been established to regulate the media landscape in Egypt in accordance with the latest edition of the constitution of 2014.

These three entities are the Supreme council for media regulations; this Supreme council is assigned to regulate the press and media in general. The National media authority, which is in charge of supervising all state-owned broadcast media. And the national press authority; it is responsible for the supervision of all the state-owned print.

The law came after big debates over the last three years since the constitution was issued in 2014. However, Dr. Hussien Amin, who was a member of the committee of drafting the law, said that it is not only a delay of three years; it is 17 years of struggling.

Interview with Dr. Hussein Amin, member of the committee of drafting the law

“It is seventeen years. The new.. when we talk about media regulation back to 1999, we introduce the first version of the law in 1999, there was a great opposition by the leadership.. the leadership of the state. the regime at that time was slowing down the process, I am not saying blocking because it went all the way to the prime minister, but slowing down the process. So this law was introduced in Al Masry Alyom newspaper and Nahdet Masr newspaper to test it, making a kind of inviting the public to read it and comment on it, but again it reached the level of prime minister and freezed. This authoritarian system is trying to balance and control of the media, so media is not completely liberal, completely independent ..no, so there are certain restrictions imposed by the government and the state. So in this sense, of course, we suffered a delay after delay after delay, because we understand, we were very frustrated, but we understood at the time that the delays coming because of fear to lose control, but this fear disappear or demolished after 2011.

However, some academics and experts believe that the media landscape in Egypt have been suffering and going through a tough time during the last few years.

Interview with Dr. Hanan Badr

“The media scene in Egypt is currently facing massive restrictions and repression phases in the past few years since 2013, after a massive popping of the political and media landscape. Now there is systematic effort to close this public sphere. This was rather done through two ways; one was rather repressive detaining journalists or harassing them in their work, the other was through legal measures.”

Egypt has one of the most established and influential media industries in the Middle East. And even though the media have been suffering from chaos in the past few years according to academia, they still believe that reaching that point of a new law regulating the media scene is step on the right track.

Interview with Dr. Mona Magdi

“Unfortunately, there was a sort of media chaos recently. There were big spaces of non-responsibility in media practices as well as on the professional level. There was no accountability from the institutions and syndicates that entitled to ask for people's rights for information. However, I believe that this research and putting our feet on the path of having a law to organize the profession and set the regulations that at least guarantee accountability and transparency is a step in moving forward.”

“Unfortunately, there was a sort of media chaos recently. There was sense of non-responsibility in the media practices. There was no accountability from some institutions that care for the mass’ rights for information and knowledge. However, I believe that reaching regulations and law that organize the scene is the first step on the right track.”

The new media law; however, was subject to criticism. There were questions and concerns from a wide range of academia and practitioners.

Interview with Dr. Hanan Badr

“Basically, it has a few problematic paragraphs that add more power to the executive power in control the media landscape. For example, the journalists can be prosecuted when they cover an event that narrative encounters the official narrative and this viewed by the power holders as a way to come back terrorism, so of course it is framed as being loyal and patriotic. Another problematic part is that the president has the power to name the heads of the three media councils that regulate the media.”

Interview with Dr. Mona Magdi

“The disadvantages might not be so notable at the moment. However, the selection process of the members who represent decision makers in these bodies is still a controversial matter. For example, how far the executive power interferes and appoints specific people and to what extent we can separate the press and media institutions from the executive authorities.”

Interview with Dr. Mahmoud Bassiouny

“The vast majority of the heads and staff of the three bodies, the Supreme Council for Media regulations, National Press Authority, and National Media Authority are governmental figures. More than 60% of each body are governmental figures or appointed by the the president. As a result, the democracy that was supposed to be there in structuring these bodies, as stated by the constitution, couldn't have been achieved.”

Parliament member “Mostafa Bakry” saying (in Arabic) “I will comment on the issue of the number of governmental figures are more than others.”

This issue has been raised also in the parliament, but some members denied that. They said that there are independent figures have been already appointed in the board of each of the three entities. Moreover, even appointing the heads of the three entities is not a problem and it's not intervening the independence of their work!

Interview with Dr. Hussein Amin

“Let me remind you that even in countries where the media is well-established, the head of Federal Communication Commission is appointed by the president. So overhear, appointing the heads is not really intervening with the concept of independency or independent press, but it could affect work for it because the level or volume of mission requirements are huge.”

On another side, there were demands even in the parliament for introducing and approving the Unified media law not only the institutional media law. There were concerns from establishing the three entities without the law itself, which might give them more power and control over the media. However, the heads of the three entities have another say.

Makram Mohamed Ahmed, Head of the Supreme council for media regulations.

“The decision of establishing the three entities first is right because it put the horse in front of the cart because these entities will supervise the implementation of the law”

Interview with Dr. Hussein Amin

“In a right transition common environment, introducing the two laws together is in fact perfect, but this is not. This is actually a time that defined by many experts as a difficult time.”

According to other experts, the new media law has also positive sides. For example, first, the new media law not only included regulations of the print and broadcast but also included for the first time the social media and digital journalism. Some experts also think that the law can provide protection for journalists.

Interview with Dr. Inas Abou Youssef

“The new media law actually has got so many positive codes that was never mentioned before. Among them, for, example, that anybody who is going to assault a journalist is going to be facing a fine of 10 thousand pounds.

Also, in the law, there is a code that is focusing on, if there is a dispute between the journalist and media organization outlet, they should refer to the high supreme council of the press four months in order to solve the dispute. And the supreme council of the press is the one to judge this dispute and then if anyone of the two parties is not satisfied, he would go to court.”

The Supreme council is in charge of regulating all media organizations. It should also guarantee independence and the fair competition among media outlets; the independency which was clearly stated in the constitution in the article 72, in particular. But whatever the challenges we are going through, there are still a lot of work to be accomplished.

Interview with Dr. Mona Magdi

“It is sure that we need development either in developing or modifying the legal articles. We need to put some specific definitions for some words that seem to have broad meanings. For example, "freedom of expression" what we mean by freedom of expression? Or "national security" What are the limits of violating the “National security”? All of these "legal terms" need to be developed. We also need procedures to implement the law.”

Interview with Dr. Hanan Badr

“There are things need to be worked on, for example, training the journalists themselves so that they can know their rights and give them legal aid to know exactly their rights and also duties to see that establish this professional culture that journalism is not crime and this is already a slogan in various protests in Egypt. But also training sessions and establishing various forms of dialogue among communities various journalists from various communities is very important because it shows us other examples from other countries and in other media systems takes place, there might be learning effect takes place intercultural and even coalitions or logs of journalists and actors who defend their rights basically and at the same time without clashing with the law.”

Interview with Dr. Hussein Amin

“There are a lot of things to be accomplished, there should be harmony and transparency in terms of the performance of the new entities as well with the presidency. This harmony is established by the head of each one that is appointed by the president. So in this sense, the part of transparency and the harmony is established because we understand that the president at least know about the three persons and know about their performance and have person contact with them.

In a wide range of media outlets and thousands of TV & radio channels, newspapers and social media platforms, and between the two sides of controversy on the new media law, the citizens just hope for improved, transparent, and professional media practices. And whatever how much controversial the new media law is, it should be a step in moving forward.
