

## Movie Script Libya: “The State of Journalism in Post-Gaddafi Libya”

by Filip Brokes and Fredrik Tombra, September 2017

---

The overthrow of long-time leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 led to a power vacuum and instability, whereby no single authority has been able to assume full control. Arab leadership council that fought to topple the Gaddafi government, called the National Transitional Council (NTC) declared Libya liberated in October 2011 and took over the running of the country. However, it failed to impose order over the many armed militias that had become active in the months leading up to the ouster of Gaddafi. In August 2011, the NTC handed over to the General National Congress (GNC), which was an elected parliament. The congress then went on to elect an interim head of state. Voters chose a new parliament to replace the GNC in June 2014 called the Council of Representatives, which relocated to the Eastern city of Tobruk and thus leaving Tripoli under the control and power of militia groups. The Islamic State extremists' militia took advantage of the conflict between forces loyal to the outgoing GNC and the new parliament to gain control of several coastal cities, including Derna and Sidra. Late in 2015, the UN broke an agreement to form a new unity government called the Presidency Council, which was headed by unity Prime Minister Fayez al-Sharraj, but both Tripoli and Tobruk administrations refused to acknowledge its authority. Mr. al-Sharraj and some of his deputies finally arrived in Tripoli in March 2016 and set up their headquarters in a heavy naval base. As a result of the continued fighting among various factions, more than 400.000 people have been internally displaced. Given its proximity to Europe, Libya has also been used as a passageway for Libyan refugees and refugees from either North African or Sub-Saharan countries. In 2015 only, an estimated 76.000 refugees and migrants made the journey to Europe from Libya. There is general concern about the permanent fracturing of Libya as the various rebels and militia groups have tried to divide the country along political and tribal lines. It is far from certain that the new unity government will be able to bring together the varying factions and re-establish stability in Libya. Given the fact that the media in Libya are typically congenial to political forces around them, the political fragmentation of the country has brought about a fragmentation of the media landscape whereby it is increasingly harder to operate.

To better understand the forming of Libya's media landscape today, we have to go back in time to 1969 when Gaddafi seized the power. He immediately took over TV and radio, and a few years later he forced the non-state-owned newspapers off the market, defacto creating a state-media monopoly. During his years as a dictator, the media frequently shifted shape and the organisations were re-organised, mainly to keep control over his people and keep the power within his family. In 1992, UN imposed sanctions on Libya due to involvement in the Lockerbie bombing in 1988. This prevented the country of taking use of modern technology and eventually led to a paper crisis in the early and mid-2000's, preventing newspapers from being published. Sanctions were dropped in 2003, but Libya remained an underdeveloped media nation. When Gaddafi was overthrown in 2011 the state media broadcaster's leaders were changed but the large staff, counting around 5-6000 people largely remained, switching allegiance overnight. None of them were journalists according to the Western standards: who held regime and elites responsible and carried out the «watch-dog» mission. They had been producing low-tech, sub-standard material that did not touch upon issues that might have caused upheaval, such as the regime, Islam, territorial and minority issues. During the uprisings in 2011, a new generation of journalists became active. Young and with little knowledge of the media industry and armed with pens and microphones, they were advocating for the rebels trying to spur the anti-Gaddafi movement on. So-called «citizen journalists». This led to a massive increase in new media outlets, both newspapers and online. Today, as Libya finds itself in a transitional face where media is a potential facilitator for debate, it needs to professionalise the media sector in order to democratise the country. Although many are pessimistic due to the low amount of quality journalists, the inability to attract talent from other Arab countries and the danger connected with reporting on militias and former rebels, some think the new generation may have what is needed to lead way, modernise and professionalise the Libyan media landscape.

---