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A governance system for civil society and the right of access to information

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In an effort to create a more effective and efficient role for civil society organizations, we would like to see a real implementation of the set of rights granted to them by international instruments. Being a shaping actor in the designation of public policies in addition to its crucial role in the political decision making process, Think tanks in the Arab World need our specific attention.

Although the number of think tanks in the MENA region is noticeably increasing, especially in the Arab Spring Countries, the importance given to them is really meagre. While studies and researchers constitute the biggest part of a think tank work, the right to access to information is marginalized.

G7 and donor countries have a duty to push the post-revolution governments to adopt laws that allow think tanks access to information and to ensure that no unreasonable limits or restrictions are imposed on this fundamental right. Equally important, there should be a set of rules and mechanisms to protect think tanks in order to cut the road in front of any attempt to control their work or to put them in a subordinate position.

Independence, neutrality and objectivity are determining factors for the success of a think tank and guaranteeing them in a favourable political climate would definitely result in a greater and more efficient civic participation. For this reason above all, strengthening cooperation between international and national actors to empower Arab World think tanks is becoming a must for us. We believe that if cooperation between G7, donor countries and national governments were increased, think tanks would achieve greater actions and results.

More than four years after the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, the civil society in Arab spring countries has widely reflected the evolution of its democratic transition. It has witnessed a great expansion, not just in relation to the number of associations but also in relation to the field of interest and the diversity of projects. This evolution can be explained by the post-revolution social mobility on the one hand, and by the changes brought to the legal framework that regulates the creation and the management of associations on another hand.

As a result, this legal framework organizing associations and NGOs has witnessed several modifications leading to a more democratic and flexible law in some countries (such as in Tunisia and Bahrain) and limiting more and more the associative work in others (for example Yemen, Jordan and Sudan).

For this reason, it is very important to review the laws related to associations and NGOs and to improve the dispositions related to the governance of association, to control and to support mechanisms.

Reviewing current tax and accounting systems related to associations and implementing new mechanisms adapted to the specificities of the associative work in addition to the necessity of reforming and reinforcing the financial control system of associations findings are all together key elements of an effective governance system of civil society associations and organizations.

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