



Syria: **Dialogue** in a country at war

Tuesday, September 19, 2017

Do we have more in common than differences? This question brought a Syrian-Arabic magazine and a Syrian-Kurdish radio station together; they made a series of programmes about the increased tensions between Kurds and Arabs. 'People are starting to think.'

Stay involved

First name *

DONATE

By Peter van Lier

The war brought tensions to the surface in areas where the different ethnic groups in Syria previously lived together in peace. Tensions that are reflected in biased news coverage about each other across the media. Much of the media in Syria is not trusted because it is biased or prejudiced. Although collaboration between like-minded media channels is often regarded as necessary by the media themselves, it never really gets off the ground.

Nevertheless, the Syrian magazine Enab Baladi and the Kurdish radio station Arta FM chose to do so. It was the first time an Arab and Kurdish media organisation have collaborated. 'This is what our politicians have not achieved yet,' says Siruan from Arta FM.

Both organisations are supported by Free Press Unlimited and are signatories of the Syrian Media Charter. This is a unique manifesto of ethical journalistic principles that form the basis of the work of the emerging Syrian media. In a dictatorial country where, after 40 years, suspicion has become second nature and an opinion could be fatal, this cooperation between Syrians can be seen as unique. About 40 media organisations have added their signatures. The Charter was established on the initiative of Free Press Unlimited, who brought these organisations to the table seven times between 2014 and 2016.

Living together peacefully

'The goal of the joint programme between Enab Baladi and Arta FM is to demonstrate that we have had a history in which we lived together peacefully,' says Siruan. 'Due to the war people have forgotten this. Especially the young people (he calls them the war generation) are missing this historical awareness.'

The focus of the programmes is based on what the Kurdish and Arabic Syrians have in common. On the radio and in the magazine there were reports about, amongst other things, mixed marriages, trade, business and music - things that happen between the communities and have been shared for centuries.

Hate and abuse

Last name *

E-mail address *

Submit

The programmes attracted hundreds of responses. Not always positive. Hate also came to the surface. On Facebook, 50 percent of the comments under the articles were abusive. From both sides.

The programme makers learnt three things. Firstly, the formation of the question is very important. 'What do you think of mixed marriages between Kurds and Arabs?' leads to different responses than 'Do you know people in a mixed marriage? And how is that marriage going? How are those people?' The answers to the second question are much more nuanced.

A second lesson was that collaboration led to a wider audience being reached. The readers of the magazine are mainly focused in the north of Syria and around the capital city of Damascus. Radio Arta FM broadcasts in the Kurdish region. The organisations now also exchange information and news, for example, about the Syrian peace talks in Geneva.

Dialogue

A third lesson was that it was good that the reactions, however negative and personal, were expressed. It gave the journalists the opportunity to respond personally and to engage in a conversation. 'For example, if you ask them if they hate you personally, they often say that this is not what they mean. Then people are really to going to think. That alone is already important', says Siruan. 'Sometimes a dialogue arose. I believe, in principle, that everyone is good.'

Starting a dialogue between different parties is crucial in a country as divided as Syria. No matter how difficult it is, media organisations begin to realise that they have a role to play. Also, those media organisations operating in the part of Syria under the control of the regime. One of the partners of Free Press Unlimited formulates it like this: 'More than ever before, we have to prove that we are professional media. We must enter into dialogue with the media on the other side. They are not our enemies. Our true enemy is journalism that is neither professional nor ethical.'

The success of the collaboration led to a second series of programmes, but now between two Syrian Kurdish radio stations, Arta FM and HARA, with the meaningful title 'The Dialogue of the North'.

SHARE THIS PAGE:



PROJECTS

Digital security courses for journalists & activists

Empowering media through collaborative crowdfunded journalism

Together for reliable information in Africa

NEWS

Call for proposals: submission for a documentary

The impact of COVID-19 on the global struggle for freedom

Insiders info: Fact-checking journalist over fake news

ABOUT US

About us

Publications

Vacancies

Disclaimer

Privacy statement

Subscribe to newsletter

Complaints and reports

CONTACT DETAILS

Weesperstraat 3

1018 DN Amsterdam

The Netherlands

T: +31 20 8000400

E: info[at]freepressunlimited.org

IBAN: NL92 INGB 000 000 7676



PARTNERS

greenhost.



Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken

CERTIFICATIONS

