



3 December 2015

## ***Freedom vs Control: for a Democratic Response***

***Surveillance – what is the right dose?***

***Building trust and resilience in diverse societies***

***Media responsibility in the “age of terror”***

### **Summary**

The 2015 edition of the World Forum for Democracy took place after the 13 November Paris attacks, highlighting the pertinence of the theme chosen and the urge to provide answers to the three sets of questions raised. A high turnout, discussions in multiple fora and the testing of initiatives in the labs, not only provided for rich reflection material, but also for a number of recommendations (see below) that can be addressed to national authorities, media, and local communities as well as to international organisations such as the Council of Europe.

*“The terrorist cannot destroy our democracy... but we can”*

The debates emphasised the need to check the *cost-effectiveness of surveillance*, the risks of its encroaching into constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, its effects beyond national borders, the way in which it is managed and the central question of proper oversight – parliamentary, judiciary and financial. Even though the debate about surveillance is lively, whistle blowers are still few and no meaningful democratic control can be exercised by civil society. This is because the civil society is not equipped enough to assess the effectiveness of surveillance and its impact on freedoms. Calls for an enhanced civic engagement over surveillance issues can only be made in functioning democracies with sufficient cyber literacy levels.

Whilst legal restrictions to freedom of speech and attacks against journalists were still encountered in many countries, *media* themselves felt they had a unique, own role to play when it came to exposing government and secrete agencies’ mishandling and/or violation of citizens’ rights. Civil society was also concerned with up-holding the vital role of a free and independent media. A recent PEW research study presented at the Forum showed that in some countries there was large support to limitations of press freedom when dealing with sensitive issues related to national security. Hence

the strong calls made to journalists to continue to focus on investigative journalism, reporting from theatre and strong ethics to be respected at all times.

*“You can tweet a revolution, but you cannot tweet institutions”*

The consolidation of “counter-revolutions” regimes following the Arab spring was seen as a major contributing factor to the thriving of Daes’h. Populations in the region were doubly hit by tyranny and terrorism. Calls were made to stop cautioning such regimes, and instead give support to forces committed to changes towards democracy.

*“We need less reaction and more reflections”*

Although fear could never be eradicated fully, it was assessed that the best antidotes against it were: keeping a high level of trust in democratic institutions - notably in the justice system - and avoiding the traps of singling out entire groups or geographical areas as dangerous or deviant. The diversity in our societies needed to be managed by building “shared narratives” by integrating different approaches/stories that exist within local communities. This was successfully showed by the winner of the democracy innovation award. Building resilience and trust could not come from top-down. Grass roots, community-level work towards integration were seen as the first necessary step towards changes in the orientations of political leadership.

## **Recommendations**

### ▪ **To national authorities:**

- ✓ focus on targeted surveillance, based on a strictly professional approach – within remit of specific mandates entrusted to agencies by law- based on effective use of manageable data and respect of HR standards
- ✓ provide adequate parliamentary, judiciary and financial oversight and financial auditing over spending of intelligence agencies
- ✓ up-date legal framework to catch up with technology and ensure transnational cooperation through existing structures and institutions (including CoE) in order to provide adequate oversight over practices that circumvent national HR restrictions
- ✓ communicate objectively and clearly about security threats

### ▪ **To national authorities and international organisations:**

- ✓ Fight terrorism by supporting change towards democracy in the Arab world
- ✓ Policies, programmes aiming at “de-radicalisation” to be well targeted and not extended to entire groups or geographic areas
- ✓ enhance cyber-literacy
- ✓ support confidence-building measures (CBMs) for journalists coming from countries in conflict situations
- ✓ support the setting up of a UN SG Rapporteur General for Journalists’ protection

▪ **To media:**

- ✓ Continue engaging in investigative journalism, notably investigating big business and reporting from theatre
- ✓ Maintain professional ethics at all times, no different standards apply when reporting about terrorist attacks
- ✓ Refrain from using too clear-cut, readymade analysis and resist pressure of large speaking fees, TV contracts and book deals
- ✓ Adapt journalism to new formats that speak to young people and internet users

▪ **Civil society :**

- ✓ Work closer with national and local authorities on the integration of migrants and refugees
- ✓ Support and defend media freedom defenders
- ✓ Local Communities to create own – bottom up- narratives about integration using not counter but shared narratives
- ✓ Avoid the danger of closing down on a single narrative