

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/tunisia-state-media-appointments-discussed-29-08-2012,43282.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Tunisia

Talks at prime minister's office

State media appointments discussed at meeting with government

29 August 2012

[Read in Arabic \(بالعربية\)](#)

On 24 August, Reporters Without Borders had a meeting at the prime minister's office in the Kasbah with government spokesman Ridha Kazdaghli, and Jamel Tahar and Nejmeddine Hamrouni, political advisers to Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali.

The talks gave the organization an opportunity to express its concern and incomprehension at the persistence of inappropriate appointments to top state media posts and to point out that there was an urgent need for the creation of an independent body to regulate the broadcasting sector.

The organization's Tunis representative sharply criticized the Tunisian authorities' control of the state media and the lack of a transparent system for appointing managers.

She recalled that on [7 January](#), the government hastily appointed new managers to a number of state media organizations, such as the news agency *TAP*, the newspaper publishing arm SNIPE and the national television organization. It said the fact that several top posts were vacant justified the need to move quickly.

On 24 April, the [sudden removal](#) of **Habib Belaid** as interim head of the national public radio network caused an outcry. Four state radio directors handed in their resignations in solidarity.

In early July, the [dismissal](#) of **Sadok Bouabène** as director general of *Wataniya TV* and the appointment of new directors for nine state radio stations prompted Reporters Without Borders once again to deplore the lack of a consultation process to regulate the appointment and dismissal of senior staff in Tunisia's state broadcasting system.

The most recent cases quoted by Reporters Without Borders were the appointment on 17 August of **Imène Bahroun** as head of the Tunisian National Television Organization and on 21 August of **Lotfi Touati** as director general of the Dar Essabah media group, which is 80 percent state-controlled.

"What was at first described by the government as an exception became the rule as the months went by," the organization commented, noting the importance of independent state media in a democracy. "The government must put an end once and for all to the lack of transparency that surrounds the latest appointments."

On 21 August, the journalist **Boutheina Gouiaa** invited members of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT) to discuss the state media appointments on her daily programme "Between News and Rumour" on *Tunisian National Radio*. After it aired, she was told she was being reassigned to the Information Department.

At the Kasbah meeting, Reporters Without Borders expressed its concern that some representatives of the government were incapable of accepting criticism. Yet their position as

public figures necessarily exposed them to adverse comments.

The government representatives said the application of the new media laws 115 (print) and 116 (broadcasting) had been entrusted to a parliamentary committee. They had been deemed "non-consensual" and would be revised. Reporters Without Borders said this was regrettable and expressed the fear that the revised versions would be watered down. It stressed that it was important for Tunisia that its legislation meets international standards.

"It is imperative that the government and the National Constituent Assembly take a stand against the current legal vacuum, which amounts in effect to a means of controlling the media," the organization added.

Reporters Without Borders welcomes the consultation framework put in place after a protest demonstration by *Dar Essabah* journalists on 22 August, which brings together the prime minister's office and professional bodies to tackle the problems of the news industry.

However, a mass meeting organised by the SNJT on 24 August voted for a general strike on 15 September unless the authorities respond favourably to the journalists' demands, a sign that the confidence of those working in the media has been seriously eroded despite the government's action.

The authorities do not appear to have heeded the journalists' appeal. Lotfi Touati, the new director general of *Dar Essabah*, arbitrarily removed one of the three sub-editors working on the daily *Essabah*. He also published a list of those entitled to edit the newspaper's editorials.
