

**Organizing Information, Regulating Communication.
EU-Maghreb Cross-meeting between judges and journalists**

Date: 21.Jun.2012

Place: Center for Cross Cultural Learning, Rabat, Morocco

Organized by: CIDOB; United Nations University - International Institute for the Alliance of Civilizations (UNU-IIAOC), Barcelona

June 21 - 22, 2012

*“In democracy, freedom of expression and accountability
are two sides of the same coin”.*

Sihem Bensedrine, EU-Maghreb Cross-meeting 2012

The CIDOB Foundation and the United Nations University International Institute for the Alliance of Civilizations (UNU-IIAOC) organized an EU-Maghreb cross-meeting between judges and journalists, which took place in Rabat on June 21-22, 2012.

Within the framework of the **Inter-professional Experiences** initiative driven by the CIDOB Foundation, twenty judges and journalists from different countries on both shores of the Mediterranean (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Italy, France and Spain) met together to explore the political dimension of the relationship between information and communication. They also discussed the conditions of acceptance and negotiation and the regulation of the spheres of responsibility of journalists and the judges in different societies, which too often involve different interpretations and misunderstandings in communication.

Panels were organized around different main topics that concern both judges, who are experts in guaranteeing the law and upholding the essential balances of political and legal pluralism, and journalists, who play a threefold role as providers of information, disclosers and critics.

On the first day, **Yolanda Onghena**, Senior researcher of the Intercultural Dynamics Programme of the CIDOB Foundation, and **Carlos Gómez**, President of the Provincial Audience of the Balearic Islands, Spain, underlined the need of shortening the distance between judges and journalists. **Carlos Gómez** conducted two panels: **“Independence of the judiciary, press freedom”** and **“Public procedures and freedom of expression: principles and constraints”**. These sessions mainly focused on the relationship between the media and justice, which is characterized by an unbalanced alliance in democratic regimes that needs to combine freedom of expression, counter-power and legal ethics, while taking into account the right of public access to information. **Simonne Gaboriau**, Honorary President of the Chamber at the Court of Appeal in Paris, pointed out the core issues of both professions, setting a common ground for shared commitments between journalists and judges: *“truth, freedom and responsibility”*. **Carne Colomina**, Head of the International section of *Ara*, Spain, argued about the main financial and social challenges faced by journalism and its new role in the social context, evidencing the need to preserve its independence, while serving the public

interest: *“there is no democracy without journalism”*. **Marie-Luce Cavrois**, First Vice-President of the High Court of Créteil, France, highlighted the importance of transparency, publicity of procedures and a public debate in legal actions. Indeed, publicity of procedures contributes to the transparency and thus, the quality of justice. *“When there is a conflict between freedom of expression and justice, constriction of the first must be justified”*, stated **Florence Hartmann**, a freelance journalist.

On the second day, Nouredine Affaya chaired both the third and the fourth sessions, which focused the debate on **“The image of justice in the media, the image of the media in the justice”**, which aimed at comparing both perspectives, and on **“Institutional and professional issues: regulation and deontological ethics”**. **Carlos Gómez** defined the relationship between judges and journalists as a *“mirror game”*, a play of reflections. In this sense, they need to recognize each other and clarify their roles in order to avoid control by the political and economic powers. **Jacopo Zanchini**, vice-director of *Internazionale*, Italy, underlined that it is important for media *“to defend diversity”*.

Participants analyzed the institutional mechanisms that should be implemented to assure the right of public access to information. According to Sihem Bensedrine, a Tunisian journalist, human rights activist and President of the Tunis Center for Transitional Justice, although freedom of expression has been gradually achieved, its practice is *“in some way, chaotic”*. Bensedrine advocated for autoregulation, the creation of professional entities able to relieve the pressure on justice and make professionals accountable for their work: *“In democracy, freedom of expression and accountability are two sides of the same coin”*. Cyril Lemieux, sociologist and director of studies at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris, stressed the need for differentiating between public opinion accountability and public opinion pressure.

A rich and fruitful debate among all participants followed each session. Judges and journalists shared their concerns, misgivings and good practices, comparing their own professional duties. They worked on identifying the complementarity of their mission, in particular in situations of political transition where there is a need for a redefinition of the treatments of basic rights, may them be the right to information or the right to good-quality justice.

This event allowed participants to discuss different initiatives and proposals for cross-training and cross-meeting activities. They all considered the meeting as a starting point for future collaborations.

A bilingual French-English publication will present a general report of the meeting, highlighting the content of the debates and reflecting the most revealing aspects of justice and communication both in the North and the South of the Mediterranean. Following this, an electronic version, which may be accessed at the website www.cidob.org, will reproduce the publication and include presentations of some participants who are keen to make a voluntary contribution.