With mass protests in Syria in full swing, and violence reaching unprecedented levels, it may at first seem peculiar to release a volume of papers that document and analyse the inner workings and fate of Syria’s civil society as it manifested itself on the eve of the uprising in early 2011. The current clashes between armed groups and the regime, their sad trail of human casualties and suffering, and the regional and international intrigues affecting Syria’s current plight all appear to be deserving our more immediate attention. Yet whatever the outcomes of the current uprising and confrontation may be, the role of Syria’s civil society will be crucial. The country’s reconstruction, in any possible political scenario, will rely on the nation’s brightest, most experienced and engaged citizens who, in one way or another, managed to build a track record of civil engagement and development work.

Content of the bulletin:

Introduction: Civil Society Against All Odds by Salam Kawakibi en Bassma Kodmani

Chapter 1: The Emergence and Evolution of Syria’s Civil Society by Salam Kawakibi and Wael Sawah

Chapter 2: Reinforcing Values of Citizenship by Hassan Abbas

Chapter 3: Feminist Websites and Civil Society Experience by Yahya Al Aous

Chapter 4: Syrian Charities at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: Their History, Situation, Frames and Challenges by Laura Ruiz De Elvira

Chapter 5: A Tale of “Community-Civic” Work in Salamiyah: The Experience of “Friends of Salamiyah” Society by Mohamed Aldbiyat

Chapter 6: Syrian Cinema and Civil Society by Fadel Al-Kawakibi

Chapter 7: Civil Society and the Gender Issue by Nawal Yaziji

Chapter 8: The Health Sector and Civil Society by Fouad Mohammad Fouad

Chapter 9: Syria’s Very Governmental Non-Governmental Organisations by Salam Kawakibi

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