

After Years of Abolition, Why Has Egypt's Ministry of Information Returned?



The Egyptian government's decision to reinstate the Ministry of Information to the cabinet lineup following approval by the House of Representatives in its Tuesday session on February 10 has reopened a wide-ranging debate within media circles and across segments of public opinion.

The move was not perceived as a routine administrative adjustment; for many, it signaled a political message that extends well beyond the mere creation of a new ministerial portfolio.

Since the January 2011 uprising, the position of minister of information has remained a persistent flashpoint. Some view it as a national necessity amid the state's internal and external challenges an essential mechanism for managing the media landscape and reinforcing the official narrative.

Others, however, associate the role with historical guardianship over the public sphere, warning that it could evolve into a tool for restricting freedoms and undermining media independence. Between these competing visions, the post has remained one of the most divisive in Egypt's political life.

The position was removed from the governmental structure in 2014, when the cabinet of engineer Ibrahim Mahlab abolished the ministry while retaining oversight of the sector through alternative bodies: the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, the National Press Authority, and the National Media Authority.

Over more than seventy years, the media portfolio has undergone multiple transformations in both name and mandate from the Ministry of National Guidance established after the 1952 revolution, to the Ministry of Information, and later the Ministry of State for Information.

These shifts unfolded amid an enduring debate over the appropriate role of the state in media affairs and the boundaries between regulation and oversight, control and independence.

Today, with the ministry returning to the forefront even as regulatory bodies continue their work, the same questions reemerge albeit in a different context: What prompted the restoration of this post? How will its powers be divided vis-à-vis the already established institutions? And does its return signal a redefinition of the state's role in managing media, or merely a reordering of its tools?

Does Egypt's Media Sector Need a Ministry?

Under the 2014 Constitution, Egypt established an institutional framework to manage the media sphere through three principal bodies tasked with organizing and supervising the sector, each with defined mandates intended to delineate the relationship between the state and media outlets.

The first is the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, a legally recognized body with technical, financial, and administrative independence, as well as its own budget. It oversees broadcast and audiovisual media, in addition to print and digital journalism and other platforms.

The constitution assigns it responsibility for safeguarding press and media freedoms, preserving independence, neutrality, and pluralism, preventing monopolistic practices, and monitoring funding sources within media institutions.

The second is the National Press Authority, which manages state-owned press institutions and works to develop them, maximize their revenues, and preserve their assets to ensure sustainability and continued performance.

Third is the National Media Authority, responsible for managing and developing state-owned audiovisual and digital media institutions, while also seeking to

enhance their assets and operational efficiency.

Given this institutional architecture, the system appears already equipped to supervise all branches of the media landscape print, audio, and visual. This raises a fundamental question: What is the rationale for reinstating the Ministry of Information, if these three bodies theoretically oversee the entire sector?

Why Now?

According to a statement by the presidential spokesperson, the ministry's return comes as part of directives issued by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to ensure that public opinion is fully informed of the facts “through a national media capable of reaching all segments of Egyptian society and delivering a responsible professional discourse that shapes collective awareness in the face of the challenges we confront and the rumors being circulated, while promoting a culture of constructive dialogue, sound thinking, and respect for differing views.”

In this context, Daa Rashwan was appointed to lead the portfolio, deemed well suited to the task. Since 2017, Rashwan has served as head of the State Information Service under the presidency. He also acted as coordinator of the National Dialogue initiative launched by the presidency and last year participated in founding the National Front Party, which emerged from the Union of Arab Tribes led by businessman Ibrahim al-Argani.

Observers suggest that restoring the ministry reflects a conviction within decision-making circles that a more centralized mechanism is needed to manage the media sphere—particularly amid what the state sees as rapidly evolving challenges in the communications environment and the flow of information.

Despite substantial investments in the sector over recent years, including the establishment of a private company United Media Services tasked with overseeing much of the media landscape and reportedly linked in various ways to the General Intelligence Service, media performance has remained subject to ongoing evaluation and debate. It has frequently been described as an area requiring recalibration or development.

President el-Sisi has repeatedly expressed admiration for the media model of Gamal Abdel Nasser characterized by a single voice and unified message achieved through dominance over all channels of intellectual and societal influence a model he has sought to emulate at various points since assuming office.

What Could It Add?

With the three constitutionally mandated bodies still operational, some voices argue that reinstating the Ministry of Information signals a tilt toward greater

centralization in managing the media system. From this perspective, introducing a new ministerial layer may indicate a desire to tighten control over public and private platforms alike, facilitating greater unity of decision-making and message coordination under direct political supervision.

Similarly, the move may reflect an effort to articulate a more cohesive media strategy aimed at reducing disparities in official messaging, particularly in response to domestic and international criticism, especially on political and human rights issues. Rather than allowing multiple centers of initiative, this view favors privileging a unified voice—even if expressed through varied channels.

Within this framework, Rashwan's appointment carries particular significance, given his tenure at the helm of the State Information Service, which for years has served as a primary interface with international media and responded to what authorities describe as inaccurate narratives.

According to proponents of this analysis, the ministry could effectively evolve into an advanced defensive platform tasked with managing the state's image, repairing reputational damage, and countering critical campaigns at home and abroad.

Accordingly, some observers interpret the ministry's return less as a mere administrative addition and more as a recalibration of influence and control over the media sphere.

From Guidance to Control

Over more than seven decades, the Ministry of Information's image and function in Egypt's public consciousness have evolved from a formal channel for conveying state policy and fostering national sentiment to an institution increasingly associated with expanding governmental influence over cultural and media domains, shaping messages to affect public opinion.

This functional evolution placed the ministry at the center of recurring debate, particularly during pivotal moments in Egypt's modern history, when it played a significant role in directing public opinion in ways critics argue diverged from realities on the ground notably during the June 1967 defeat and the January 2011 uprising.

The ministry's roots trace back to the aftermath of the July 23, 1952 revolution, when it was established as the Ministry of National Guidance to manage official discourse domestically and abroad. Over successive eras, its name and structure changed; culture was at times separated from information and later reintegrated, while the declared aim remained organizing public messaging and building institutions capable of articulating the state's orientation.

During the presidencies of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, the ministry became entrenched as a central apparatus overseeing radio, television, and the national press, with growing attention to Egypt's image abroad and the development of broadcasting tools. Over time, it came to be seen by critics as a “well-dressed policeman” defending and promoting the state's narrative.

After the January 2011 uprising, the ministry entered a new phase of instability, oscillating between abolition and reinstatement under the title “Ministry of State for Information,” with multiple officials assuming leadership amid sharp political transitions. It was eventually abolished again until its current return to the cabinet under Daa Rashwan.

In sum, the ministry's reemergence revives longstanding concerns among segments of observers who see in the move the potential for further centralization and a narrowing of already constrained media freedoms. They question whether reinstating the portfolio will effectively mark the end of the limited relative independence still enjoyed by some platforms, or whether a different vision might emerge in practice.

Others, however, contend that accelerating transformations and mounting internal and external challenges may compel a new approach one that redefines the relationship between state and media and opens the door to roles distinct from those entrenched in public memory.

Between these two possibilities, the question remains suspended: Will the trajectory lean toward tighter control, or toward a new equilibrium? The ministry's practical conduct in the coming days will provide the answer.