

Workshop report: Improving democratic governance and state-society relations

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Introduction

In the framework of the Initiative for Peacebuilding (www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu), an European Commission financed consortium coordinated by International Alert, the discussions of this workshop focused on the role of the international community in supporting processes of democratization and the transformation of state–society relations in fragile and conflict-prone countries, with particular attention to the case studies of Angola and Pakistan. This is the result of a joint effort between FRIDE, Clingendael Institute and International Alert, all members of the IfP Democratization and Transitional Justice cluster.

Angola: international engagement and state-society relations

The two presentations by the panellists took a standpoint in the internal dynamics of Angola post the peace and the country's role in an international perspective respectively. It was stated that Angola could be characterised as a hybrid state or an electoral autocracy, with power structures comparable to the ones in Ethiopia and Rwanda. Rather than being a fragile state, in Angola there is a state resilience with a power structure centralised around the president. This takes its expression in patronage networks as well as quite effective parallel structures which are to a large extent undermining advances of democratic governance as well as the democratic institution and capacity building. Furthermore, crucial for Angola's post-war development is the fact that peace was achieved by military means and as of this there have never been any real incentives for integration of ex-combatants. These immediate post war issues not being addressed have lead to significant socio-economic exclusion among other things.

The important role of Sonangol, the state owned oil company, was emphasised in several respects. The company consolidated the financial and economic control of the presidency especially over Angola's oil extraction sector but also beyond. At the same time, participants affirmed there have not been any real reforms, only ones that have actually led to an increase of the presidential control. Despite the extensive economic growth, there have been no significant improvements in social and economic justice. This due to that state revenue more or less exclusively comes from sectors such as Sonangol's and hence the state is by no means dependant on its citizens for revenue.

As mentioned above, the second panellist highlighted the important connection between the Angolan elites and the international community. It was distinguished between the official international community, meaning donors and diplomatic representations, and the real international community including actors such as private and state corporations. Foreign aid is very limited in the Angolan state budget and does only represent 0.5 percent of the GDP, hence another financial factor creating little incentive for reform according to the donor's potential preferences and conditionality. In Angola, the financial flows are extensive and most significant for the power of the Angolan elites,

originating in the benefits of the oil extraction sector. Furthermore, participants indicated the rising role of military actors in the sale of equipment for the state security service apart from the involvement of western oil companies and financial entities. The increasingly important roles of China as well as Brazil in the country's internal affairs were also stressed.

The discussion continued to evolve around the new constitution announced in January 2010 which consolidated the presidential powers, abolished the prime minister and established a vice-minister as well as dissolved direct presidential elections. This decision led to the next elections being postponed until 2012 (and only indirect, through the parliament), and the next elections not to be held for another ten years, in 2022.

Nevertheless, participants also affirmed that a slow transition towards improvements in state-society relations and democratic governance as well as increased transparency is very likely to take place in the midterm. Drivers of change in Angola have been identified as sections of the ruling party MPLA which are opposing the centralised control of president Eduardo dos Santos together with the military and civil society organisations. Also changes in the economic structure of Angola will possibly lead to changes in the political organisation.

Furthermore, participants stressed that, as aid is so small and rather insignificant, another level of dialogue is needed in order to promote more fluent state-society relations and democratic governance in Angola. This is/could be based on the Angolan elites' interest to establish its international legitimacy and a positive image that was identified as a window of opportunity. Moreover, it would be important to support civil society organisations especially outside the capital Luanda through capacity building and financial support in order to hold the government accountable.

Media and governance in Pakistan

In the Pakistan session, there was a focus on media as a potential driver for domestic change. The country has been classified as a transitional democracy and the presentation showed a rather complex perspective of a fragmented society with little domestic consensus. This is something that is in turn reflected onto the country's media. No internal unified perspective exists on the expectations on the role of the media and its behaviour; the Pakistani media landscape, being nearly nonexistent pre independence had to be created from scratch. The media has as of this been a tool in the hands of various military regimes according to repressive/controlling principles, protecting the interests of the ruling elite since Pakistan's independence.

During the session it was questioned to which extent the media has an impact in Pakistan. Due to low literacy rates – even though they have been increasing in later years – there is a very limited space for newspapers as a voice for the whole society. Instead, a key trend of significant growth in (TV) broadcast media has been seen. With satellite receivers being cheap and easy to access in combination with the rapid growth in the number of TV-stations, media is undoubtedly more accessible and is more effectively penetrating the country's households on an impressive scale as stated by the panellist. The quantity of media has however not translated itself in an equally widespread offer of a voice to the population of Pakistan. The platform is still kept controlled by the establishment and it is very rare to read or hear news about common

people or social issues. News coverage is kept hostage either of policymakers or of opinion makers with unclear agendas.

There are however different expectations on how the media should behave in Pakistan. The Pakistani media shows a clear inclination for more sensationalist journalism rather than for more serious news coverage. The division between the English and Urdu media was stressed during the session, with the latter showing stronger preferences for the sensationalist angle. Furthermore, another structural weakness is the absence of a clear code of conduct, something being emphasised as clearly needed. It was highlighted how most media groups are pursuing a clear political agenda, with its journalists being visibly biased, promoting their or rather their employers' views with little restriction.

Further contributing to the lack of more objective coverage in the context is the role of the journalists themselves. There are currently few journalists being properly educated and trained, and the ones that are already within the profession receive nothing or very little in salaries. This in turn has created a situation where journalists' services are for sale. It was highlighted how journalists gain extensive influence by writing on behalf of or against local ruling elites. This being the way to make money in the profession is a factor to explain the salaries situation. It was stated that liberal journalists are mainly the ones making money, working for international news agencies or for popular cable TV channels. Pakistan is furthermore the country with the highest number of journalists killed over 2007 and 2008, something that might not add to the profession's appeal. This is not strictly due to the Taleban but state institutions also have a role to play in this. Many journalists are on the payroll of the security services.

It was concluded that it is too early to pass judgement on the international community's role in the Pakistani media landscape. The role of media as important non state actor was emphasized and hence capacity building in this field has to be stressed. Furthermore there is a need to approach the media in a more intertwined manner with the educational system.

Conclusions

The debates during the workshop led to different conclusions regarding the possibilities for the international community, and especially the EU, to support effectively the more fluent state-society relations and democratic governance. There were lessons to be drawn from Angola and Pakistan in particular on peace and democratization processes to be applied to post-conflict countries in general. In broad terms, the international community needs to focus more on state-society relations through the support at the grass roots. Civil society capacity support is crucial to hold the government accountable and to promote channels of communication between state and society; media playing an important role.

