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Report of the seminar at the EC delegation to Pakistan “Pakistan State-Society Analysis: Operational Implications & Follow-up Research”

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Introduction

The program of the workshop had been discussed and agreed upon with the head of the Political Affairs, Trade and Communication section of the EC Delegation, Dr. Tomas Niklasson.

It was organized around three sessions, for a total duration of about three hours. The three sessions included: a) a presentation, by the two authors, of the main findings of the report “Pakistan State-Society Analysis”, released by the Initiative for Peacebuilding in January 2009; b) a discussion of the operational implications of the analysis in the report for the EC Delegation; c) a discussion around possible ideas for follow-up research.

Report

Dr. Niklasson acted as chair of the workshop and coordinated a first round of introductions by the participants. The EC delegation was represented by a dozen of its staff, both national and international.



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The first session was the lengthiest of the three as it included a detailed presentation of the main findings of the report by its two authors. In line with its title, “Understanding Pakistan’s Challenges: A Three-dimensional View”, the presentation was structured around three analytical dimensions: the Foundational Factors; the Rules of the Game; and the Here & Now. Among the Foundational Factors, special emphasis was given to the history of state formation and the geo-strategic position. Among the Rules of the Game, relevance was given to the formal framework, the political competition, the distribution of power, and to some of the most important and foreseeable key trends. The Here & Now section focused on the internal conflict, the public opinion, the Taliban, and the degenerating situation in Baluchistan. Finally, some options were presented as to the possible role of the international community in dealing with governance issues in Pakistan. Those options included the development of an objective and independent media, the strengthening of basic social services, public finance management, capacity-building programmes for legislative bodies, and possibly support to local government (decentralization) initiatives.

The presentation triggered a lively discussion that centered on some of the raised issues and at the same time represented a sort of reflection on the EU and, more broadly, on the international community’s role in Pakistan.

For instance, one of the first issues that was raised referred to the National Finance Commission and its allocation procedures, slowly increasing the share of disbursements at the provincial level.

The issue of corruption was also raised, with specific reference to the 2002 National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the fact that, to date, there had not been any analysis of the implementation of this strategy, while a specialized agency had been formally established to implement the strategy.

Questions were also raised as to the possible direction the Pakistani leadership wanted to take its country in terms of development. There was a general sense of a complete lack of political willingness and incentives on the part of the national government to define this direction. The same government was also perceived as providing no guidance at all to the international community concerning the identification of viable and effective development strategies. On its part, it seemed that the international community was increasingly focusing on poverty reduction, with the World Bank leading the pack.

The EC Delegation’s staff confirmed their involvement in sector budget support programs, mentioning the example of a livestock capacity building program.

At the same time they expressed some concern about the impact of the release of huge financial resources by the US as part of their revised regional strategy.

A lack of absorbing and implementation capacity was already observed at the current levels of cooperation and that bode not well in case of a serious increase in the size of financial inflows.

Serious problems with implementation were acknowledged, with international governmental organizations practically unable to operate in the FATA, NWFP, and Baluchistan. The Pakistani government could be regarded as an alternative option, but only partly, as its capacity to have a quick impact was deemed as very low.

The same government had apparently entrusted the Economic Affairs Division with the responsibility to deal with the international donors, but not much progress had been detected on that front.

Finally, Dr. Niklasson expressed his interest in seeing follow-up research taking up the issue of the role of the (mainstream) media as a progressive or regressive agent of change within Pakistan's society. The idea was briefly debated in the plenary discussion, among others, by referring to a recent article by Ahmed Rashid which had been published by the BBC and which dealt with the role of the media in upholding conspiracy theories rather than focusing on the real issues affecting the country. Marco Mezzera, the main author, agreed on the relevance of the issue and proposed to discuss it further the day after in a separate meeting with Dr. Niklasson.