



THEMATIC ROUNDTABLE 3

Role of the Civil Society and the Private Sector in Democratic Governance and Development

The Panel was chaired by Poland and co-chaired by Hungary. Mr Richard Rowson from Council for Community of Democracies acted as Facilitator.

The aim of the panel was to discuss actions taken by civil society organizations and business supporting adherence to the rule of law and improved capacity of democratic institutions to advance development while strengthening democratic governance, highlighting specific roles for Community of Democracies member countries and non-governmental organizations.

The thematic roundtable reflected the activities of the CoD Working Group on Democratic Governance and Civil Society which is chaired by the India and co-chaired by Poland and Hungary. The group has recently proposed two important projects aimed at promoting Democratic Governance.

The chair opened the roundtable with a description of the principles which guide the role of civil society, the private sector and governance in democratic governance and development.

The ensuing discussion of specific projects, which emerged from joint civil society-government participation in the CD Working Groups and by other joint government-civil society consultations, illustrated how this process works in practice. The participants indicated the key importance of civil society being represented through its International Steering Committee (ISC) as an official participant in the drafting process of the final “consensus” document as it was in these was in the “run-up” to the Bamako 2007 Ministerial. Such participation would help ensure, that concrete projects proposed by the Working Groups are included in the declaration of such conferences in the future.

The first project presented during the meeting, called “State and Civil Society – Working Together for a Better World” was initiated by Hungary. Its objective is to provide an assessment of government policies regarding the status of civil society in order to eliminate barriers to their effectiveness and stimulate civil society’s ability to encourage the growth of democracy. It is aimed at achieving this goal by creating a mechanism to assess the practice of governments in fostering civil society. The results of such assessment, with a special focus on best practices, would be summarized in reports to the Ministerial Meetings of the Community of Democracies. The project is also aimed at providing the states, the Community of Democracies and civil society a new tool enabling an increasingly important role of both in promoting democracy. The International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT) in

Budapest has taken the lead in implementing this project with support and initial funding from the Government of Hungary.

Another project discussed was the publication of “A Diplomat’s Handbook for Democracy Development Support,” which is a training manual on the relationship between diplomacy and civil society. It was pointed out that civil society groups often turn to diplomats for advice and assistance, and vice versa. In many cases, diplomats are unsure what they can appropriately do to be responsive and effective. There is considerable experience in this field but it has not been properly collected, analyzed and made available to diplomats, civil society and the general public. A well-researched Handbook for Diplomats and Civil Society would enhance active participation between diplomats and non-governmental organizations in promoting democratic governance. The project has received initial financial support from the Governments of India, Canada and the United States and a number of NGOs and Princeton University.

It was agreed that the role of the private sector extends beyond the economics of business. The private sector can exercise its social responsibilities and contribute to the advancement of democracy as for example in adhering to important international agreements dealing with voluntary partnerships and initiatives that promote corporate social responsibility (CSR) and improve good governance of natural resources such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

In this connection, the role of the media and the new technologies including Internet was highlighted. It was pointed out that Internet is difficult to control despite efforts by authoritative regimes, as a useful tool to disseminate objective information and analyses for the citizens of such, whose governments endeavor to deprive them of this access.

A final civil society-government initiative which was discussed during the roundtable was the call expressed in the Bamako Consensus Declaration for implementation of the Global Strategic Plan for Democracy Education launched jointly by the Council for the Community of Democracies (CCD) and The American Forum for Global Education in 2003 in response to the Seoul Biennial Plan of Action. During the discussion it was suggested that a handbook on democracy education should be produced. As part of that discussion the important role of the family in creating the necessary conditions for development of vibrant culture of democracy as was voiced by the NGO delegate from Ethiopia. It was also pointed out that when we are promoting democracy we should also practice democracy within civil society organizations.