

## REPORT

### “Political Party Dialogue: a facilitator’s guide”

On 16 October 2013, the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) – the first European Community of Practice on Democracy Assistance, hosted the launch of the publication “Political Party Dialogue: A Facilitator’s Guide” at the Residence Palace in Brussels. EPD organised this event on behalf of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights (OCPHR), with support from mediatEUR, as part of its Knowledge Sharing Programme.

This programme aims at gathering and sharing knowledge on the way organisations and practitioners are supporting transition processes in countries outside the EU, to increase synergies among actors and to strengthen programming related to Democracy support focusing on need-based analysis.

#### **Key objectives:**

The key objectives of the launch were to raise awareness of the relevance of political party dialogue (PPD) in political reform projects at country-level; to commence with a policy dialogue on PPD among relevant stakeholders; and to foster a better understanding of PPD that could allow for its enhanced integration into EU external democracy support policies and frameworks.

#### **Participants:**

The event brought together decision-makers from: the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission, in particular DEVCO; political party assistance providers and practitioners; representatives from Kenya and Honduras; representatives from democracy assistance, human rights and peace-building NGOs; and from permanent representatives of EU member states.

#### **Opening session:**

The first session highlighted that effective and inclusive dialogue between political parties is an essential element of democratic politics. Conflicts, inter-party strife and polarised relations between political parties can block a country’s development, while a basic level of trust and cooperation between political parties can pave the way for peace, stability and sustainable growth, in particular regarding: poverty, conflict and water supply.

Andrew Bradley from International Idea stressed the importance of the role of civil society in generating political dialogue, and ensuring the respect of human rights to ensure democratic engagement to get citizens trust.

During the discussions, three areas of impact were underlined that are crucial to determine if political party dialogue is improving or not:

1. Peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction
2. Democratic consolidation and political reforms on-going
3. Sustainable socio-economic development

Jean-Louis Ville of DEVCO emphasised the importance of the Lisbon Treaty, which promotes democracy in developing countries as a key objective of the EU. He highlighted that one of the essential conditions for the EU is that it deals with a pluralistic political party system, in which political parties are seen as competitors for power and influences, but also as bearers of

accountability towards the citizens. In most democracies, parties are however weak institutions that lack capacity and are formed around leaders instead of ideological or programmatic agendas. He underlined that direct funding of political parties is still not allowed, but and so, support provided to parties can only be indirect.

Sam van der Staak, also from International Idea, presented the Guide that captures common dilemmas in political party dialogue and shared different practical experiences in some 25 countries (see relevant PP presentation).

As recommended in the guide, a political party dialogue process should include all political parties, woman, youth and minorities; involve parliaments in the debate and coordinate with other key actors. He then stressed the importance of considering, especially from a long-term perspective, the major causes of conflict and adopting a realistic implementation period for a road map.

NIMD's representative from Georgia, Levan Tsutskiridze, gave a perspective from the South Caucasus. He focused on the practical issues of the dialogue process, saying that while it is crucial to have set criteria for participation and ensure flexibility. He raised some questions that should be discussed whenever a dialogue is initiated: when do we open the dialogue? How do we address the process in terms of institutions? While political party dialogue mostly take place in capital cities, what happens in rural areas? How do you include these regional groups?

Canan Gündüz, from mediatEUr, presented the "EU in Mediation and Dialogue Reflections and Recommendation Synthesis report", highlighting the key role of mediation in the context of power sharing as well as in the peace-building process. She remarked the importance of exchanging best practices between the mediation community and the political party assistance community to learn from each other and to better facilitate the transition from crisis to democracy and peace.

Among the questions that were raised during the exchange of views were:

- How do you generate and promote gender equality and space for young people;
- How do you turn political party dialogue into a permanent or semi-permanent process;
- Which parties should be included in the dialogue?
- How do you tackle the role of civil society and the media?
- Why is dialogue needed? Is it an objective itself?

### **Country cases:**

The Guide (<http://www.nimd.org/handbook/2997>) contains case studies on political party dialogue from across the globe and describes the different dialogue mechanisms involved. It provides concrete considerations for policymakers, practitioners and politicians that can be used at country level and in a broad range of contexts.

To provide concrete examples of this, the second part of the event focused on analysing lessons learned from the cases of Honduras and Kenya.

### **Honduras case – presented by Miguel Calix (NIMD country director in Honduras)**

Miguel began by explaining that the most relevant problems in Honduras are: poverty, 80% of the population lives below the poverty line and suffers high inequality; economic growth is not enough to provide sufficient resources; the country is still dependent on exportation products and on migrant remittances. Furthermore the country is facing high levels of violence due to drug trafficking and micro-criminality.

After decades of military government there was a return to civilian rule in 1980. In 2009 there was a political crisis and President Zelaya was forced out of office, which brought on a period of instability and violence, ending with the elections of 2010

To overcome the crisis of 2009 and to help avoid a civil war, political party dialogue is needed to strengthen mutual confidence, transparency and increase the legitimacy of the elections. NIMD is

contributing to this process by facilitating and sponsoring inter-party dialogue, organising forums with all political parties, and by promoting bilateral and semi-closed meetings, especially in the beginning phase, to assist trust-building.

This process lasted for 14 months and included several mitigation measures, such as direct and multiple approach, lobbying and confidentiality. NIMD ensured inclusiveness in calls for meetings, mutual respect and tolerance, impartiality in facilitation, decision by consensus, and fostered openness to other opinions and ideas.

Miguel concluded that during the on going transition process, it would be useful if the EU would continue observing the situation and keep a close eye on the country so as to be prepared in the event of another crisis situation.

### **Kenya – presented by Njeri Kabeberi (Executive Director of the Centre for Multiparty Democracy-Kenya)**

Njeri began by presenting a brief history of Kenya, which, after independence in 1963, was a multi-party state. In 1982 after an attempted coup, the country became a one-party state and the opposition leaders were arrested without trial. In 1991 the entire world was changing and Kenya was under a lot of pressure: the Parliament removed the law that prevented the existence of different parties and so paved the way towards open elections. In 2002, the so-called National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) removed the dictator Kanu from power.

NIMD, through its support to CMD-K, played an active role in the dialogue process, by promoting daily meetings between key actors in the country. They included all political parties, civil society organisations, women and youth, it was considered that everybody who accepted to talk was an ally. There was a media intervention to disseminate information about the importance of the on-going dialogue process and to help reach actors in the more rural areas.

The discussion highlighted the link between development and politics; the weakness of the political system hampers security and development. Eradication of poverty is not possible without stability.

### **Conclusions:**

Political dialogue is a long lasting process; it requires methodology, internal preparation, facilitation of the debate and above all, compromise. After elections have taken place, dialogue must continue or the result could be polarisation and renewed instability.

Some of the challenges raised through during the event related to the dialogue process and asked the following:

- How do you build consensus?
- How do you implement a dialogue mechanism?
- How do you introduce equality and inclusivity in dialogue?
- How can you get civil society actors to participate?
- How do you ensure transparency in the whole process?
- How to better link and exchange experiences between the Peace building & Mediation Community and the Political Party Assistance Community?