DPI Roundtable Meeting: "Conflict, Crisis and the Role of the Media"

Carried out with the kind assistance of the National Endowment for Democracy and the Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs

18-20 November 2016, Geneva, Switzerland

Summary Report

Foreword

The following is a summary of the discussions that took place during DPI's recent Roundtable meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, from 18 to 20 November 2016. The roundtable addressed the topic of '*Conflict, Crisis and the Role of the Media*', with a particular focus on the cases of Northern Ireland and Colombia, as well as other international examples. The meeting brought together diverse and preeminent figures from across Turkey's media, including senior journalists, columnists and broadcasters representing both mainstream and alternative media outlets. Many comprise Turkey's most influential opinion shapers. Also in attendance were expert speakers from international media, government and the United Nations as well as representatives from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. Many thanks go out to all our speakers,

Owen Bowcott, Tom Kelly and James LeMoyne, for sharing their experiences, wisdom and expertise to inform our discussions and grow our shared knowledge.

This was the first opportunity for the journalists to meet following the attempted military coup of 15 July 2016, and it provided a timely platform for free and frank discussion. This proved useful during the course of the Roundtable meetings and in side meetings. The activity also prompted further discussion within the media itself, with participating journalists, commentators and broadcasters sharing the experiences gained at the roundtable with their respective audiences and readerships during and following the activity. Participants and the public also actively engaged with social media, in particular via Twitter, throughout the activity. The activity included a dinner reception hosted by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs on the opening night, a full day of discussions, and a final day given to evaluation of the activity and key findings. I would like to express DPI's appreciation here to the Swiss FDFA for their support and for hosting and to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) for their support in delivering this activity.

This activity was delivered by DPI's team in London and Turkey and here particular thanks are given to Programmes Intern Anum Farhan for her invaluable contribution to this activity. As always, DPI's activities are held under the Chatham House Rule. In the interest of transparency, a full transcript of the October 2016 roundtable meeting is available to the public. Please contact info@democraticprogress.org for further information.

Some DPI Participants in front of the Ecumenical Institute in Bogis-Bossey, near Geneva

Other research papers on the subject of conflict resolution, and all previous DPI activity reports, can be found via the Institute's website: www.democraticprogress.org. This activity builds on previous media related activities carried out by DPI, all of which are recorded on our website, and among which include the following:

- "The Role of Language, Identity and the Media in Conflict Resolution", Istanbul, Turkey, 8 November 2014

- "The Relationship between State and Media and its Effect on Conflict Resolution", Mardin, Turkey, 29 June 2013

- "The Role of Media in Conflict", Istanbul, Turkey, 28 April 2012

Kerim Yildiz
CEO, Democratic Progress Institute
2017

Introduction

The subject of the media's role in conflict resolution is today highly pertinent to Turkey, and this roundtable offered the rare opportunity for diverse voices from across the spectrum of the country's media to come together to address the issues and challenges being faced in this field. The experiences of comparative examples of conflict resolution, and the important place of the media within them, continues to provide insight into the ways in which the media can be a positive force for progress. Examples from Northern Ireland and Colombia have demonstrated the power the media holds in terms of shifting the public discourse with regards to conflict and the resolution thereof. It can be essential in fostering positivity and support for a process among the public, or it can be used detrimentally to perpetuate divisive discourse and warmongering – the media has the capacity to act as a "spoiler" in this sense. The many different cases of conflict resolution all demonstrate the pivotal part that can be played by the media in raising awareness of key issues, and in preparing all levels of society for engagement with the process of conflict resolution.

Understanding the role of the media as crucial actors in peace building and democratic reform is therefore essential in order to support wider conflict resolution efforts. Media at local, national and international levels can influence and shape debate, and its importance cannot be overstated. We hope that this record of the discussions that took place during the Geneva roundtable will provide a step towards tackling the many issues raised surrounding media bias, self-censorship, the language of the media and approaches to journalism at the

local and national level, helping to influence the tone, language and question-ing employed in various media organs today.

In addition to more traditional forms of media, "new media" or "social media" – the terms used to denote an emerging range of means of mass communication via the internet, including Facebook, Twitter, and microblogging platforms such as Tumblr and others are playing an increasingly crucial role in the field of con-flict resolution today. Since the emergence of new media during the opening years of the 21st century, this phenomenon has been observed to play a pivot-al part in political dialogue, conflict resolution and democratic transition global-ly, especially amongst (but not limited to) youth; a trend which is likely to con-tinue as internet penetration gathers pace worldwide. The potential of social media to influence the political arena is likely to gain even greater strength and to continue along its present trajectory. While acknowledging that the bounda-ries of this rapidly growing and changing space still remain relatively new and uncertain, it is important to engage with and observe the developments that are taking place in this field and to realise the potential role this area has to play within conflict resolution efforts.

Media in all its forms is a tool that can be used to encourage democratic socie-ties, based on the key components of inclusive dialogue, participation and en-gagement. It has the capacity to help develop a healthy civil society which en-gages with the key issues being faced. The media can be indispensable in chal-lenging dominant discourses and narratives and in prompting discussion on central but often invisible or "taboo" issues. It has the ability to prepare and empower citizens to participate and engage with issues at both a national and

local level, allowing them to comment on and monitor activity and to be part of different processes and efforts, for example in the area of conflict resolution.

When unrestricted and free, both traditional forms of media, but also non traditional forms of new media have the potential to offer the inclusive and open space for conversations about the dominant discourses, and to allow for diverse and opposing views to be shared. It is vital that such spaces encourage mass participation in conversations, to allow for narratives or established perspectives to be challenged and for different viewpoints to be shared. The transmission of new ideas in the networked space of the media, allows for a vast conversation to take place, in which citizens can engage with one another inclusively and democratically.

When used effectively, media can therefore be a powerful means of bringing people together and bridging divides, regardless of hierarchies, norms and societal rules. It can be an important means of overcoming differences and polarisation, and can directly affect dialogue and political discourses around the definitions and perceptions within the context of conflict and its resolution, for instance. In order for the effects and the influence of the media to be positive rather than negative however, it is essential that a sensitive language of peace is adopted, and that support of democratic and conflict resolution processes is encouraged through objective reporting and interpretation of events, rather than warmongering and a focus on "breaking news".

For actors within the media itself, such as journalists, columnists, reporters and other broadcasters, this entails a continuous responsibility to question

oneself and one's judgments, and to provide material that is conducive to conflict resolution and the reduction of tensions, rather than conflict creation. In the context of conflict resolution, this raises important questions regarding timing, confidentiality and transparency, and the balancing of the need for information versus the need to support conflict resolution efforts underway.

All of the discussion that took place during this roundtable underscored the key role which media plays in society today, and emphasised the need for greater understanding and discussion in this area. DPI endeavors to continue to provide a platform for discussion as well as research and analysis in this field.

Context: Dialogue and exchange following a major crisis

This activity took place during an extremely challenging time in Turkey's political climate. In the aftermath of the attempted military coup of 15 July 2016, the role of an open and independent media has become more crucial than ever. At this extraordinary juncture in Turkey's history, it is vital that democratic progress should be supported through enabling the collaboration and combined efforts of the different aspects of society, including the media. DPI's experience of building platforms for international comparative knowledge exchange has proven to be an effective and fruitful means of addressing the complex issues of relevance to Turkey today and the Geneva roundtable demonstrated the value of such conversations in the context of the media in Turkey today.

Some DPI Participants in the Conference Room of the Ecumenical Institute in Bogis-Bossey, near Geneva

The meeting brought renowned columnists, writers, and television broadcasters from various platforms together for the first time since the failed military coup. While previous DPI roundtables have gathered media representatives alongside political actors, civil society leaders and academics, this meeting drew exclusively on media representatives, given the crucial need for a narrowly focused discussion relevant to this particular field at present. Among some of the most senior participants were Ali Bayramoğlu, a renowned journalist and commentator, formerly columnist with Yeni Safak and currently writing for Al-Monitor; Cansu Çamlıbel, senior journalist for daily Hürriyet and Hürriyet Daily News and member of Doğan Media Group editorial board; and Balçiçek İlter, a primetime broadcaster and noted journalist for HaberTürk

Daily Newspaper and HaberTürk TV, as well as Avni Özgürel, a senior commentator for several highly prestigious media platforms. Other preeminent figures from Turkey's media took part, representing various platforms ranging from Al Jazeera International, Hürriyet, Milliyet, and Cumhuriyet Daily Newspaper among others. The full list of participants in attached in the Annex to this report.

> *'We need to have these meetings for greater participation. We should look for ways to expand this participation.' – DPI Participant*

Participants met with speakers Tom Kelly, UK and Irish media commentator and former Spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair; Owen Bowcott, former commentator on Northern Ireland and current Legal Affairs correspondent at The Guardian as well as James LeMoyne, Former UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Colombia, and war correspondent.

DPI's Chief Executive Kerim Yildiz also addressed the participants, giving introductory comments regarding the roundtable and on the imperative need for the freedom of expression within any democracy and the crucial role played by a responsible, fair and free media in this regard.

Roland Salvisberg, Head of Section Peace I at Human Security Division and Georg Stein, Mediation Adviser at Swiss Federal

Department of Foreign Affairs, speaking at the first night reception

Aims and objectives

The meetings that took place during this two-day conference in Switzerland focused on the ways in which the media can play a key role in conflict resolution, even when facing significant difficulties and extraordinary wider circumstances such as those being witnessed in Turkey.

The participants, representing a diverse range of mass media outlets (newspapers, television, mainstream and non-traditional media) were given the opportunity to meet in a neutral environment, away from the current

political climate and conflict environment. A location was chosen near Geneva, to provide a space where participants were secluded in each other's company alongside experts, generating fruitful discussion through proximity and interaction over the two days. The distance from the domestic context succeeded in creating a neutral space within which delegates could learn from the many experiences of the conflicts and peace processes in Northern Ireland, South Africa, the Philippines and South America (Colombia, El Salvador) as well as take part in valuable dialogue and exchange with one another.

Tom Kelly, former Spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair introduced by the CEO of DPI, Kerim Yildiz

The key objectives of this roundtable meeting were as follows:

1. To provide an inclusive platform for dialogue:

Inclusive dialogue is not only important during periods of ceasefire, but is especially relevant when conflict returns. This roundtable focused on presenting different cases of conflict resolution to offer the opportunity for common learnings and knowledge exchange. While every conflict is unique, comparative international models can offer vital examples in terms of lessons learned and challenges faced, and can often be key in drawing vital principles in the area of conflict resolution and democratic advancement.

The vital role of the media as an instrument for free speech and dialogue, and for engaging the public in supporting conflict resolution was central to this roundtable and provided a common point of focus for all of the diverse participants present.

2. *Facilitating collaborative expertise and knowledge sharing:*

DPI aimed to facilitate collaborative expertise sharing by encouraging the participants from diverse media to focus their attention on commonalities with other conflicts, rather than on their own differences, and to explore potential solutions with conflict transformation experts and those who have first hand, practical experience. This was achieved through presenting and discussing examples of successful uses of the media in other conflicts.

3. *Establish the constructive role of the media in times of crisis:*

Speakers in the roundtable discussed their experiences of the ways in which the media has proved instrumental in supporting solutions to conflict, including

during times of crisis, such as increased violence or societal polarisation.

Through this activity, DPI sought to develop innovative approaches to participate in and influence the process of finding democratic solutions to conflict, in particular through the media, as a crucial institution within society. The roundtable allowed delegates to express diverging perspectives regarding their own situation in a frank and open manner and to draw constructively on the experience shared by the expert speakers.

Owen Bowcott, former commentator on Northern Ireland and current legal affairs correspondent at The Guardian and James LeMoyne, Former UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Colombia, and war correspondent, a panel moderated by Ali Bayramoğlu, Turkish senior journalist and commentator

Themes

The three very different accounts of the role of media within conflict resolution, drawn from the contexts of journalism, government and the UN and from various international cases, provided rich perspectives and enabled in-depth discussion and question and answer sessions. The meetings highlighted the fact that any conflict resolution process necessitates the sustained participation and commitment of various actors within society to succeed, and that the media is a crucial participant in this sense.

Kerim Yildiz (DPI CEO) provided the focus on Turkey in relation to the intersection of media and conflict, emphasizing the lessons that comparative study provides regarding how the media can engage effectively with conflict through to resolution, noting that this engagement is predicated on the existence of a free media. Noting the recent challenges posed by the attempted military coup, Mr Yildiz assured participants that despite the current difficulties, DPI believes that this period offers a new opportunity to promote full democratization in an inclusive approach to resolution. He noted the integral role of freedom of expression in democracy and the immeasurable importance of the role media can play in broadening the base for democracy, telling the participants "it is possible to implement peace without democracy but not democracy without peace". He further noted the enormity of influence exercised by the media and the responsibility this offered in complex political circumstances.

Following Mr Yidliz's framing of the topics and themes, the speakers used their respective expertise to share on elements of these overarching subjects. Key themes addressed throughout the roundtable include the capacity of the media to **support transition periods** in conflict resolution by raising awareness and **preparing and broadening the bases of civic dialogue** across society; the need for media to **accompany the solution process** through its use of **balanced reporting**, **peace language** and **positive vocabulary**; the need for solidarity and **bridging the divide between the various media**, specifically when faced with limitations and challenging circumstances; the role of **social media** in supporting conflict resolution; and the importance of the **role of the media and freedom of expression**

'It's very easy to write propaganda. It's very easy to write one sided stories. It's harder to write balanced and informed news in a fair way.' James LeMoyne, Former UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Colombia, and war correspondent

Speakers drew on their respective expertise in relation to the media, governance and conflict resolution and to provide a variety of perspectives on the way in which media can function effectively through challenging periods in order to support conflict resolution. Particular attention was paid to the way in which the media interacted with the government and the UN in various international cases.

'For a peace process to succeed, the context has to be right, media is a vital ingredient in getting that context right. [In the Northern

Ireland context,] media was an important driver in humanising attacks and bringing the conflict to a stalemate. Media increased the pressure for a ceasefire. Viewers became increasingly used to seeing anchors question the process and that gave them confidence to be involved in the debate.' – Tom Kelly, former Spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair

The need for adaptability and commitment to the process as well as personal integrity and honesty in dialoguing with the media were all shared as important lessons learned from the Northern Irish experience. The theme of journalism ethics and adhering to a way of reporting that keeps the integrity of the process of reporting but is also sensitive to whether sharing a certain peace of information could advance or indeed hamper the peace process, was also a recurrent discussion point throughout the meeting. The issue of 'self-censorship', and moral dilemmas faced by journalists and columnists in this regard were discussed, with Owen Bowcott sharing his perspectives in relation to the Northern Ireland case.

DPI Participants engaging with Owen Bowcott and James LeMoyne

Other topics discussed in the context of Northern Ireland and Colombia in particular, included questions of leadership and political commitment in a peace process and the relationship between parties to a process (including government) and the media; the importance of privacy and backchannel negotiations and the challenge of balancing this necessity with transparency and the need for public information. The ongoing need for the media's support and presence following the signing of a peace agreement and in the longer term was also discussed. The example of Northern Ireland was used to demonstrate that platforms for dialogue, and the use of peace language within the media are more relevant than ever in the fragile post Good Friday Agreement context, with issues of borders, security and identity continuing in the aftermath of the 'Brexit' referendum.

'The language of the news is another thing. Even in a so-called peace process, in the media we didn't use peace language. The journalists were just trying to break news, and trying to catch up with the details. Sometimes we impeded the privacy of the process, but I think there is a crisis in the transparency of processes. Journalists were more interested in details which had not been told to the public...they sabotaged certain processes.' – DPI Participant

Speakers expressed the view that while the media cannot bring peace, they can however 'create the desire for peace.' A message that was echoed throughout the roundtable was that ultimately, success or failure of the peace process does not rest with the media, but rather the the media comprises an important stakeholder.

'Even in the worst conditions, I am expecting something better.' – DPI Participant

DPI participants at the Geneva Media Roundtable

'Peace efforts seem to go in a long cycle of failure. Remain open to at least the possibility of peace at some point. People can change. It is hard to believe at the moment of battle.' James LeMoyne, Former UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Colombia, and war correspondent

Timing and media sensitivity were also addressed. In the context of Northern Ireland, the tension between the desire to deliver peace quickly versus the delicacy and patience needed regarding the detail of often lengthy negotiations were discussed, along with the importance of media support in this regard. The fundamental importance of the role of leaders within a peace process, and their cooperation with, and representation within the media were also topics which were discussed in detail, in particular in the context of Northern Ireland.

James LeMoyne, Former UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Colombia and War Correspondent, shared his experiences as an active part of mediation and negotiation processes around the world and covered the importance of balanced reporting, and the internal questions consistently required of journalists covering a peace process. Many such questions resonated with participants, including: Am I being fair? Am I telling the truth as best as I know it? Do I have sufficient information to say what I'm saying? Have I given the other the chance to offer their views?

The topic of communications strategies was addressed by participants and speakers, with Tom Kelly sharing first hand experiences in this area from his

time as Spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair, and expressing the importance of flexibility and perseverance during any peace process, in order to keep it on track during difficult circumstances.

'My strategic advice to anybody else trying to work through a peace process is don't kid yourself. You cannot sit down and write how you're going to respond in Colombo, in Turkey, wherever. You have to absorb the local context. You have to know what your big picture goal is. You have to work through a zig-zag process… Projects like peace processes take a long time to deliver.' – Tom Kelly, former Spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair

Conference Room Overview – Media Roundtable, Geneva

The failed military coup attempt witnessed in Turkey in July 2016 was discussed in the context of challenges faced by the media today, with some

sharing the view that the current situation has in fact provided a new opportunity to discuss full democratisation, with an inclusive approach to the resolution process. The integral role of freedom of expression within democracy and the immeasurable importance of the role media can play in broadening bases for democratic advancement, were therefore key themes underpinning discussion.

Most importantly, the significance of staying on course throughout the cycles of failure and success within a peace processes was emphasised, as was the need for the media to alternate between the preparation of the public and active phases of peace reporting by the media.

Conclusion

By inviting them to the neutral setting of Switzerland and away from the domestic environment, participants were brought into close proximity to one another for the duration of the two day activity, a situation which was conducive to ongoing conversations and interactions beyond the roundtable sessions themselves, and which has helped to build a constructive network. A number of key outcomes may be concluded from the conversations that took place during the roundtable and between the various sessions, as well as during the final evaluation meeting that occurred on the final day of the activity.

DPI participants during the Internal Evaluation Meeting

The participants unanimously and consistently expressed their desire to continue communication among themselves beyond the visit, and are especially keen to continue to participate in DPI activities in this area. All of those present called for further meetings of this kind to take place, as a vital platform which will allow for dialogue and knowledge exchange in this area during the extraordinary challenges presently faced in Turkey.

All agreed on the importance of committing to a language of peace within their respective media, noting the importance of the vocabulary and terminology employed in newspaper columns and televised broadcasts.

   '*The reality is that they [journalists] may be criticising you because they are ideologues, because they are viscerally opposed, but equally*

they could be opposing you because they are asking legitimate questions which need to be answered.' – Tom Kelly, former Spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair

Other best practices were identified and evaluated, and participants considered the ways through which to implement the tools and solutions offered by the international examples presented.

The single focus on the topic of the activity was maintained during the roundtable and enabled in-depth discussions on the responsibilities of both the mainstream and alternative media within the context of conflict and its resolution. The roundtable expanded the scope for dialogue on relevant and pressing issues and challenges relevant to Turkey today in the context of the media, and has laid a strong foundation for further activities on this subject.

DPI participants during Internal Evaluation Meeting

Participants expressed that the experiences shared during the activity had led to a fuller understanding of the importance of media at this critical time and had also inculcated a sense of responsibility towards supporting fellow journalists, fostering a deeper sense of solidarity among participants from opposite ends of the political spectrum and providing a focus on commonalities regarding the challenges faced, rather than on differences, regardless of the diversity of political backgrounds and perspectives present.

'You can't half-commit to a peace process, you have to fully commit. You have to be prepared to show that it is difficult. That you are putting your political career on the line.' – Tom Kelly, former Spokesperson for Prime Minister Tony Blair

The question of how the media can assist the pursuit of a peaceful resolution to a conflict while a peace process is stalled was discussed in detail. DPI affirmed its commitment to broadening the bases for dialogue on this topic and highlighted the importance of preparatory work during this time, such that when dialogue is resumed, as many people as possible have been brought into conversations about resolution, including by way of the media, and are equipped to engage with the process in a positive and informed manner.

Importantly, participants were unanimous in expressing their desire to continue the dialogue embarked upon in Geneva, across political positions and varying perspectives, and voiced their strong willingness to ensure that communication on the role of media within conflict resolution continues, in

spite of the current challenges being experienced.

Some DPI participants, Private Tour in Geneva, post-conference

Annex: Participants

Name	Title and Affiliation
Ahmet İnsel	Columnist at daily Cumhuriyet Newspaper, political commentator and academic
Ali Bayramoğlu	Senior journalist, political commentator, academic, columnist at Al-Monitor
Avni Özgürel	Senior Journalist and publisher, Columnist at daily Yeni Birlik and political commentator for several TV channels including CNN Türk TV and NTV News
Ayşegül Doğan	Kurdish journalist and TV programmer for IMC TV
Balçiçek İlter	TV programmer at HaberTürk TV and Columnist at daily HaberTürk
Cansu Çamlıbel	Senior Journalist for daily Hürriyet and Hürriyet Daily News, Member of Editorial Board of Doğan Media Group, biggest media group in Turkey
Fehim Işık	Senior Kurdish journalist and author, columnist at daily Evrensel, political commentator for several Kurdish TV channels and leftist TV channels in Turkey , expert on Kurdish question in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria
Mahmut Bozarslan	Senior journalist based in city of Diyarbakır and working for Voice of America Kurdish service and Al Jazeera International, contributor to BBC Turkish Service and columnist for Al-Monitor

Oral Calıslar	Senior journalist
Nagehan Alçı	Columnist at Daily Milliyet, political commentator on CNN Türk TV's programmes on local and international politics
Yeter Polat	İstanbul based news editor for BasNews, Kurdish media outlet based in Turkey