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Supporting Inclusive Dialogue at a Challenging Time in Turkey



DPI Online Roundtable Meeting 'Civil Society Actors in Turkey: Keeping the Dialogue Alive During Challenging Times'

Online

17 April 2020

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Foreword

DPI held an online roundtable on 17 April entitled '*Civil Society Actors in Turkey: Keeping the Dialogue Alive During Challenging Times*'. As part of our organisational response to minimise the impact that COVID-19 has on our work, DPI has re-planned its forthcoming events so that they take place online in order to continue fulfilling our project's aims and objectives.

This online roundtable focused on the role of civil society in dealing with conflict resolution, especially during challenging times, and discussed the role of civil society in Northern Ireland, the 'parked' peace process in Turkey, as well as the impact of COVID-19. It follows DPI's series of events which previously introduced a group of diverse civil society actors in Turkey to the key themes and principles of conflict resolution processes.

The online roundtable brought together leading civil society actors, journalists and academics from Turkey, which included both recurring and new participants. We were also joined by DPI's Council of Expert and Board members, representatives from the European Union, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ambassador of Ireland to Turkey.

The first session focused on the distinctive and various roles that civil society has played in Northern Ireland at different times. The group listened to an insightful presentation delivered by Pat Hynes, from Glenree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation, Ireland. The speaker highlighted the important role that civil society can play in conflict resolution, including facilitating highly confidential dialogue, mediation and disarmament. The group also participated in an engaging discussion on the impact of COVID-19, as well as Brexit and the implications that it poses to Northern Ireland. Currently, civil society in Northern Ireland continues to work in encouraging dialogue, especially with regards to Brexit.

During the second session, participants discussed the role that civil society presently plays in Turkey, as well as the challenges that it faces and potential openings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants noted some of the difficulties civil society actors face due to centralisation and polarisation, resulting in a shrinking civil society in Turkey. Prof Vahap Coşkun provided insightful closing remarks on the topic of civil society in Turkey. Despite the many setbacks, participants were reminded of the importance of maintaining dialogue at every level. Civil society can build bridges between opposing groups and has the capacity to bring people together during a time of crisis; the current pandemic could provide an opportunity for civil society to become more engaged and revive its position in Turkey.

DPI posted on its social media account throughout the event. The highest number of engagements on our Twitter account reached 305, which shows continued and consistent engagement by the public with our events, and also allowed for DPI to reach a wider audience and constituencies beyond those who were present in the meeting.

The feedback participants indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to hold and engage in discussions regarding civil society during these challenging times; participants also noted the diversity of the group who were present during the roundtable. They also stated that they found the session

on the role of civil society in Northern Ireland to be highly informative. Using international experiences, such as the Northern Irish case study, the roundtable served to remind participants of the role that civil society actors have played in conflict resolution during challenging times. Many of the participants remarked the need for further meetings on the topic of civil society in Turkey.

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, DPI will continue to implement its project's objectives and to work with key stakeholders in Turkey to promote peace and democracy building through strengthening public dialogue and engagement. The roundtable forms part of a larger series of activities planned in the context of the project: "*Supporting inclusive dialogue at a challenging time in Turkey*", supported by the EU and the Norwegian government.

I would also like to express my thanks to our speaker for sharing his experiences and expertise, the participants in the programme, to the DPI team in London and Turkey, who delivered this activity, as well as to DPI interns for their assistance in preparing this report.

Kerim Yildiz

Chief Executive Officer

Democratic Progress Institute

Introduction

This online roundtable focused on the role that civil society actors play to keep the dialogue alive, especially during challenging times. This roundtable follows DPI's series of events which previously introduced a group of diverse civil society actors in Turkey to the key themes and principles of conflict resolution processes.

The aim of this online event was to contribute towards broadening the bases for dialogue amongst civil society actors in Turkey; by using online channels to host the event, DPI attempted to mitigate the impact that COVID-19 is having on conflict resolution processes by creating a platform to assess potential openings that the pandemic can offer towards conflict resolution and peace building.

As with previous events, participants comprised of a diverse group of leading civil society actors, journalists and academics, from different regions, representing a broad spectrum of different political affiliations in Turkey. The group included recurring participants from Turkey to ensure continuity in trust and knowledge, as well as new participants in order to facilitate a broader reach and wider platform for dialogue. During the meeting, participants listened and engaged with a presentation by the speaker, Pat Hynes, from Glenree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation, Ireland. The roundtable was also attended by DPI's Council of Expert members, representatives from the European Union, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ambassador of Ireland to Turkey.



Kerim Yildiz, DPI CEO, addressing participants during the online roundtable

Kerim Yildiz, DPI's CEO, opened the roundtable by welcoming the participants, funders and advisers, who attended the meeting. In his opening remarks, the CEO noted the various challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic poses not only to DPI's work, but also to other NGOs, and highlighted the importance of exploring new ways to effectively deal with this unprecedented situation. He also highlighted that civil society should play an instructive role in defending human rights and freedoms that may come under threat as a direct consequence of the government responses to tackling the pandemic.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, DPI will continue its work through online meetings in order to implement its project's objectives and keep dialogue alive.

The floor was then given to the speaker, Pat Hynes, who delivered an insightful presentation that detailed the role that civil society actors played on in the Northern Ireland peace process, as well as the implications that Brexit poses. The online meeting was moderated by DPI's Head of Turkey Programme, Dr Esra Elmas.

The role of civil society in the case of the Northern Ireland peace process: challenges and opportunities



Pat Hynes, Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation, Ireland

Pat Hynes opened the first session with a presentation on the multitude of roles that civil society has played in Northern Ireland at different times. Hynes noted that civil society in Northern Ireland was able to amplify the voices within local communities and mediate the conflict during periods of strife in the region; civil society was also able to take the risk that politicians could not take. Hynes continued by stating that civil groups worked with combatants, ex-combatants, paramilitaries respectively, with an aim of including them in the political conversation. Moreover, it was highlighted that due to the grassroots nature of civil society, it created visibility for groups and pressing issues that had previously been excluded from the political conversation. They explored new problems and worked to build new relationships between different sectors of society.

The speaker noted that in the 1990s, the main role of civil society revolved around facilitating highly confidential dialogue; it aimed to create comprehensive and inclusive dialogue, which meant that unlike political parties, civil groups were prepared to take a lot of risks, especially with regards to disagreements during the process.

Hynes underlined the role of civil society in organising group sessions and workshops that encouraged free-flowing discussion rather than positional dialogue. This allowed for a more dynamic and interactive dialogue, and for the deepening of relationships and trust among the group. In this setting, participants enjoyed the full control of agenda-setting, while civic groups took the role of strategically managing the engagement process. Moreover, civic groups agreed to continue the discussion until everyone had their question answered, and everyone's issues were acknowledged.

It was noted that within the Ireland context, people have a common history, but they have different memories, which creates enormous gaps in terms of managing the conversation. In the early 1990s, the democratic space was preoccupied by political parties. The civil society took the role to create a structure where it could deepen the relationship between conflicting parties. They managed different hopes and aspirations and upheld the spirit that each party's aspiration was equally valid and had to be presented.

After the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the civil society's agenda changed to dealing with the issue of weapons, and the obstacles of implementing the agreements. Weapons illustrated the absence of trust between the parties, which was the primary concern in the post-agreement period. Civil society learnt that deepening the trust and relationship between the parties was the key to overcoming this hurdle. They were also successful in creating space for individuals to reflect on their personal grievances whilst understanding the concerns of the opposite side.

'Deepening trust and relationships is the key to conflict resolution.'

Concluding Remarks

In the long learning process of peacemaking, civil society learnt that they had to accept mistakes and initiate the dialogue process, in all circumstance. Today, the issue of memory is still the most challenging task to maintaining peace. The education system must be cautious when it comes to in dealing with the past. Civil society actors are not mandated with teaching conflict or defining the past to younger generations. They choose to focus on the opportunities which could strengthen future relationships. They agree on the fact that people must live peacefully in the future, instead of returning to the conflict in the past.

Topics of Further Discussion: Questions and Answers

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is going through unprecedented times. Many argue that as a result of the pandemic, the systems that we live in will be questioned and change. Considering all this and keeping in mind the reality of Brexit and the negotiations with the EU, what can be said about the future of Northern Ireland?

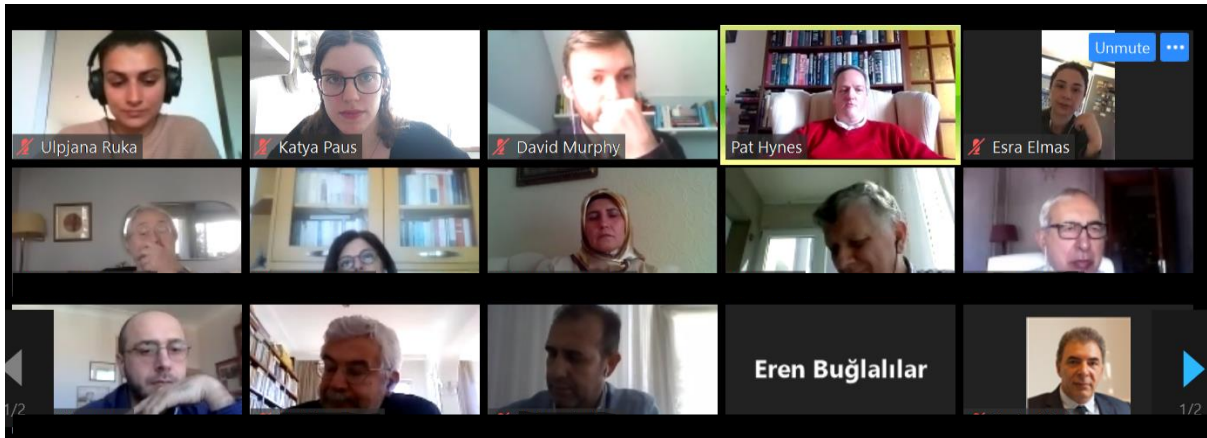
Hynes started by acknowledging that it is difficult to make predictions. From Ireland's perspective, Brexit has been a negative experience. Over the years, Ireland has greatly benefited from its European Union membership and played an influential role in shaping both the union and its policies. It is a great disappointment that the UK is departing from the EU because the mutual membership has strengthened the relationship, allowed both countries to cooperate on several issues at various levels of government from local to national. In terms of Northern Ireland, there is no doubt that the mutual membership of the European Union made a lot of the citizen related issues much easier to resolve. When the borders were taken down in 1992, military and security issues were left to be dealt with and were addressed through the peace process.

Hynes expressed his confidence in the EU Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom headed by Michel Barnier and the EU officials that are dealing with Brexit who have been fully aware of the delicacy of the situation that Northern Ireland represents as the UK departs. The solidarity that all member states showed and continue to show has been crucial in bringing the United Kingdom back to their obligations under the agreement.

In the coming weeks, given all the restrictions that the pandemic poses on everyone, it will become clearer what the United Kingdom will do in terms of their departure. The government has indicated that they would like to leave by January 2021. Given the economic impact that the COVID-19 will likely have, the United Kingdom might see this as a way of delaying their departure and reaching a more measured sense of pace and time. There is still a lot to be done, but the most important points are to give a degree of confidence to the people of Northern Ireland and to start rebuilding relationships, designing new relationships that can emerge in the new future context. In this sense, there has been reasonably good progress in the last year. The Northern Irish Assembly had been closed for almost three years. Both the Irish and British government and the previous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland worked together and achieved a very significant degree of success at resuscitating the assembly. This was a positive development because it meant that, even in the post-Brexit environment, the two governments could work together. Furthermore, resuscitating the assembly was also important to make sure that, as Brexit develops, there is a functioning institution that could articulate the perspective of Northern Ireland, all its needs and requirements. In conclusion, there will be tricky discussions ahead, but it will not be anything that people have not seen before.

What is the difference between managing the process and managing the agenda? Why is it important to prioritise managing the process?

As a mediator or as an organisation that is trying to foster a space to encourage people to join the conversation, it is important to not be seen as setting out an agenda or deciding what will and will not be discussed. It should be left to participants to bring their issues into the room. People might agree or disagree on various issues, but what is important is to understand that those issues are important for the given community, individual, or group. Hynes expressed that, during the negotiations about the conflict in Northern Ireland, they were quite happy to accept anyone in the room and accepted the issues that they brought along.



Participants listening to Pat Hynes

Hynes underlined that the process of engagement is different. There are very different processes of dialogue. During the process that led to the negotiations, Glencree’s Political Dialogue workshops decided not to use positional dialogue to avoid having many repetitive positional statements. They wanted to create an environment where participants could really try and understand the dilemmas that were being placed in front of them. In some cases, this meant that in a workshop session with fifteen people only two people would talk. This would put other people in a position where they had to listen, learn, and understand through dialogue what exactly was the matter in hand, the nature of the issue. This also meant that the discussions were most likely going to get very heated and heavy, and facilitators had to prepare themselves. The priority was to create an environment where people felt that they were heard and what they said was internalised by the other.

Having the same history but different memories about the shared history is also something relevant in the Turkish case. How can we create common memories?

Hynes expressed that, personally, the issue of memory was one of the most challenging topics. Ireland has a very difficult and protracted history. People do not even have a common memory of the civil war that happened over a hundred years ago. So, talking about incidents that took place between 35 and 50 years ago is still a very delicate issue. People are still very hurt. Trying to reach conclusions about how people remember the past was, and continues to be, an extraordinarily difficult conversation. For example, almost 4,000 people were killed in the conflict in Northern Ireland. There were around 40,000 incidents of violence. Since the signing of the agreement, there have been 4,000 trauma-related suicides. There is a huge amount of trauma and psychological damage caused by the conflict.

An example of how people remember differently can be the different ways in which people commemorate the past. Many Republicans commemorate their actions against the British, against their neighbours in their community who wore the uniform. These commemorations would take place in the community, in front of people who they must live with, but politically disagree. For a lot of people, these are moments of confrontation, moments when two ideas of remembering the past confront each other. The Unionist and those who wore British uniforms find themselves in a position where they have to defend their face and community against what they have seen as unjust attacks. The Protestant Unionist tradition remembers their lost ones differently, in a quieter manner. They will go to their home, have an empty chair at the table, and will never speak about it. For Roman Catholics on the other side -the Nationalist tradition-, the communal nature of Catholicism in terms of sharing experiences makes acts of commemoration very different. Trying to, even on a cultural basis, bring those perspectives into one place is a very difficult thing to do. This example also demonstrates how

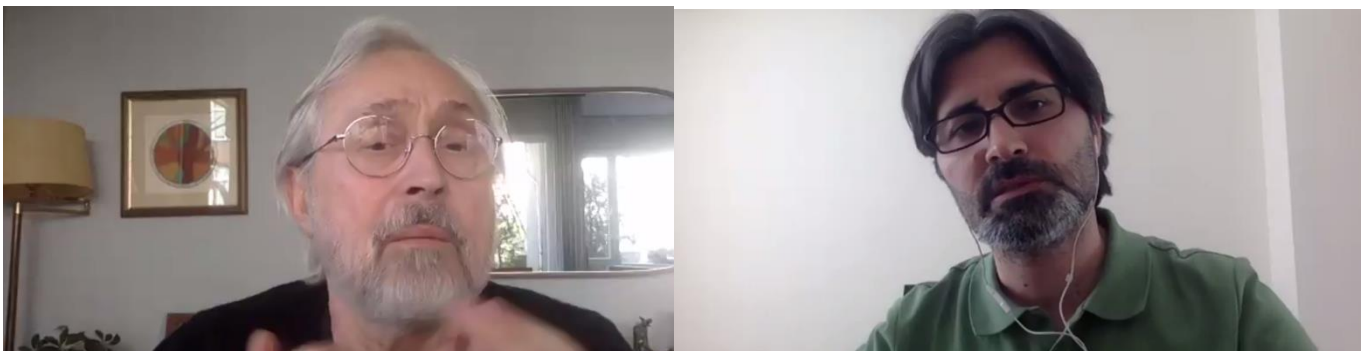
people remember the past is not only about the past but could potentially create a greater division today. There has been some success in getting the perspectives of others listened, but we will have to agree that there will not be a single version of the past that everyone remembers.

How is it possible for people to deal with the legacy of violence, especially in terms of people who used to be involved in active conflict and who later joined politics?

The abovementioned dilemma about having a common history, but not having a common memory is also valid in this case. In this sense, Hynes mentioned that he is still struggling with this question. Maybe there is not an answer in terms of how you adequately address the awfulness of those 25 years - between 1970 and 1995. The most important thing is to acknowledge the harm that was done. If organisations who were engaging in violence, including states, acknowledge the harm that they caused, that is a major step for people who have lost people either in their families or communities.

It is also important to acknowledge that, at the end of the day, the violence was senseless. Looking at things from a southern perspective, the state always opposed the use of violence as a means of resolving a political problem. The violence only deepened the problem and it deepened the problem to such an extent that in Northern Ireland, and on the island of Ireland, today people are left with the challenge of legacy.

Building on his experience in the negotiations process in Papua New Guinea, Hynes underlined that people in Papua New Guinea faced similar challenges to those in Ireland. In an island community of 300,000 people, around 25,000 people were murdered. They are looking back and trying to find a way to make sense of the situation. There too there was a political dispute that was not addressed with politics but with violence, therefore deepening the divisions. The processes are a journey that people need to go on, try to learn, and discover as they go. A new language, a new approach, and a way of engaging with communities that have been estranged and are hurt, must be developed. The use of language, in the moment and after the conflict, is crucial.



Participants during the discussion session

The importance of the role of civil society is often mentioned in conflict studies and academia, but they are hardly ever essentialised as actors in actual processes. It seems as if such processes are often dominated by state actors, intermediary states, and warring parties. Does civil society or actors such as religious figures really play influential roles in negotiation processes?

In Northern Ireland, the origins of the process began with Catholic priests in Clonard Monastery. Notably, two influential figures were Father Alec Reid and Father Gerry Reynolds. They were heavily impeded in their community in West Belfast, seeing all the horrors of the conflict as actual community workers and representatives. On the protestant side, Reverend Ken Newell, John Dunlop, and others were amongst those who very early on went into conversations with Gerry Adams and other senior Republicans who would have been involved in the violence. As early as the mid-1980s, there were

other actors in Derry/Londonderry such as the Quakers. Furthermore, various community workers were involved in discussions and in bringing the British government into the negotiations, in creating links to explore and discover what kind of public statements by the British might attract the attention of the IRA, to ultimately pull them into the process. The process was not just governmental. It could not have been. Governments can move things politically, they can sign agreements, win elections and be politically endorsed, but when it comes to the implementation on the ground, if you do not have key civil society actors who are willing to act as almost an element of social capital in society and sell the very hard details of the agreement to the people, then the agreement is not going to stick. Compromises were not embraced with open arms. Politicians move on to the next issue. The agreement that was reached and compromises that it involved for every side had to be explained and people had to be convinced. Civil society did that.

It was important to bring civil society into the negotiation table also because sometimes discussions were very highbrow, and civil society actors brought it back to the ground and to the real issues, to adequately reflect the needs of people who had been very profoundly affected by the violence. The agreement was there to end the violence, to create a new sense of relationships, to develop institutions that would better the economic and social reality. You could not have had those kinds of conversations without the civil society actors.

At this point, another participant who also has experience with the conflict and civil society actors in Northern Ireland contributed to the discussion. Reflecting on the period before the ceasefires, the participant noted three points about the period. Firstly, it can be argued that to an extent civil society controlled the conflict. The violence could have expanded even further. The trade union movements, organisations, community movements got out to the streets and organised massive protests. These were significant in a small society like Northern Ireland. Secondly, civil society was able to amplify the voices within local communities. There was a lot of talk about communities fighting with each other and indeed fighting the British army were. However, equally, there was a lot of conflict within communities. Paramilitary feuds caused many deaths. Civil society was able to mediate within that context. Thirdly, civil society was in a position where they could take risks that politicians could not afford to take. They could sound out what was possible. They were in contact with key people in key positions, with “insider outsiders.” For example, people from within paramilitary groups who themselves had started to have a broader view about what was going on worked with civil society actors and explain to them the pressure points. In turn, civil society could initiate conversations and projects to explore those pressure points. This way, civil society actors made various contacts and worked with people, long before the ceasefires. The back-channelling was done at the intermediate level.

Another thing civil society did was to walk alongside those who were the most excluded. Whenever there was an initial talk with prisoners and their reintegration into society, civil society was there. In some cases, at odds with the British government, but using EU funding. Civil society played a role in creating visibility for people and groups that were excluded from the political space. Women’s issues were one of those. What civil society did, particularly before the ceasefires, was to use issues such as socio-economic issues, functional issues to try and create these relationships. For example, one of those excluded voices are women in protestant Unionist Loyalist areas. How do you bring more voices into the conversation, but also ensure that you increase complexity? What people are dealing with is not a conflict with just two sides but of a kaleidoscope.

Referring to the previous questions, the participant underlined the fact that Northern Ireland is a very young society. Therefore, discussing the kind of future people want is very important. In this sense, it is also important to note what kind of futures are being offered to people. Will this future be within a

United Ireland, Northern Ireland, a variation of federalism, or within the UK? Here, a lot also depends on the reaction of the Republic of Ireland. If they look inwards and do not take account of Northern Ireland, it will be a step back. Finally, it should also be noted that the pandemic could present some opportunities, bringing people from across community divides together and raising socio-economic issues.



Participants ask questions during the discussion session

Many argue that the COVID-19 pandemic will have various positive or negative effects on our lives. Could the pandemic have an impact on negotiation processes?

Right now, it is extraordinarily difficult to access the potential impact of the pandemic on negotiation processes. Many are saying we will not go back to the same normality as before. With the vaccine, people will get back to a form of normality, but the pandemic has already affected many parts of our lives, including work on conflict resolution. For example, mediators will have to see under what conditions and how they can continue to host their conversations. Currently, Ireland is in a better position than many other places, but the essence of what mediators do, bring people together, face to face, to hear and understand each other will be challenging. But methods such as online meeting platforms, which DPI is already making use of, clearly represent an alternative.

What kind of measures were taken to prevent the restart of conflict, specifically in terms of education and language?

In the mid-1990s, the ceasefire did break down. It broke down because, for Republicans, the process of political engagement with the Unionists and the British government was not moving fast enough. They abandoned the ceasefire and planted a bomb in Canary Wharf. In any process, there will be setbacks. The Canary Wharf bombing was a major one. The effect it had was to bring the two governments together. A new focus was put on how to bring the paramilitary organisations into the process, in ways that constitutional and democratic politicians can also be in the room.

In terms of education, in the Republic of Ireland young people were not taught enough about the conflict because it was still new, and it was considered too difficult. People had to be very careful about how they portrayed the conflict to young people in textbooks or classrooms. Nowadays, there is greater awareness of what happened and what the conflict was about. But again, this is done very carefully. Glenree continues to work with schools, continue to work with the Department of Education, very much from the perspective of encouraging encountering other perspectives, other experiences, rather than settling on one view. Since the end of the conflict, there has been an enormous effort to make sure that the new generations do not look at things from the perspective of

older generations. Development such as Brexit can pose difficulties. At the end of the day, people still do not agree on the future of the island of Ireland. However, there is a mechanism in place whereby people simply work towards improving relationships to a point where -in the future- people will agree on new constitutional arrangements. A lot of young people are focused on this. The option to join the Republic Ireland still stands as an option, but it is a binary answer to a very complicated question. There would still be many aspects that would require attention.

Turkey was already going through a challenging time and now there is an additional crisis due to the pandemic. Is it possible to turn a crisis into an opportunity for conflict resolution?

Hynes stated that in the case of Northern Ireland, the process started as a result of multiple crises. It could not continue the way it was. There was a mutual stalemate, neither side was winning. Actors realised that they were not going to be beaten, but they could also not achieve their political aims through fighting. In this sense, 1981 had an impact on Republicans. They did not run for the elections and did not get in the parliament. When the hunger strike of Republican prisoners started, and Bobby Sands who was a member of the parliament died, thousands of people showed up to his funeral. The Republicans started to question whether those people could vote for them. Having that many people gave them the strength to turn to the political movement, with Sinn Fein from within the IRA. They began running for elections. The concept of an elected arm of the movement started. They began to understand that bullets were costing them in ballots. If they wanted to win ballots, they had to use fewer bullets. Violence became costly. It was not one crisis, but it was the evolution of the violence. They wanted to embark upon a new project which was creating a political alternative and a political party that they believed in. It is rarely one event that leads to a process but of course, there were many important milestones.

'One of the biggest steps of civil society was to listen. What is it that people want? Not a caricature of what they want, but what they say.'

One of the participants underlined that alongside the formal political arena, there were other arenas for participation. When Sinn Fein started to gain confidence within the electoral system, space was created within the community for movement. If there is a broader space for people, they can be exposed to broader ideas but also to challenges, and very often challenges from within their communities. One of

the problems in many conflicts around the world and Northern Ireland is that when the opposition is demonised, pathways for people to engage in dialogue are cut and it becomes difficult to see an alternative to violence. In Northern Ireland, up until well after the ceasefire, people from paramilitary movements and anyone suspected to be associated with paramilitaries, including their political manifestations, were excluded. One of the biggest steps of civil society was to listen. What is it that people want? Not a caricature of what they want, but what they say. Later, they focused on how to utilize that information in such a way that was respectful and brought people together.

An interesting area of study can be the groups that have not been electorally successful like Sinn Fein and looking at the ways that they can also be included, without guaranteeing them that they are going to end up with a minister. For example, FARC in Colombia failed. People often mention politics with a small 'p' and Politics with a big 'P'. The big 'P' is government, the constitutional issue. The small 'p' is giving people the sense that they can make an influence and draw on their motivation and commitment.

Discussions and assessments on Turkey

During this session, participants discuss the various issues relating to civil society in Turkey.

Whether talking about the process in Ireland, South Africa, Philippines, or even the failed process in Turkey, one participant underlined the importance of looking at the balance of power between politics and society, and how the balance is maintained. According to the participant, the function of social groups and their individual or organised actions can play an important role, especially with regards to the legitimisation of the processes. For example, in South Africa when the support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions was compared before and after the broadcasts about the commissions started, there was a significant difference in the faith in the process. Drawing on his experience as a member of the Wise Persons Committee (WPC), the participant talked about how, even though the process failed, the WPCs played a significant role in increasing the legitimacy of the process and the public support for peace.

The experience also showed that the processes depend on public support. Another point that the participant made was that wherever the committees went, they first talked with civil society members. This put civil society in a position where they could shape politics. However, it must also be acknowledged that, compared to the political power, civil society was still not as influential. Still, this should not be interpreted as civil society can be avoided in processes.

Another participant who is an active civil society actor talked about turning crises into opportunities. In 2011, when the Syrian conflict emerged, the cities by the Syrian border deeply felt the consequences of the conflict as there was a major flux of refugees. In Urfa, civil society organisations formed a platform for humanitarian aid and brought together different civil society organisations. When the conflict did not end as they had initially anticipated, the platform continued to grow and increased their capacity, reaching more places and, with the help of a diverse range of



Participant contributing to the discussion on Turkey

organisations, tackling unforeseen problems. It could be argued that this case was an example of how a crisis could result in creating opportunities, bringing people and organisations together. The participant also talked about how having an already organised civil society platform was also useful during the peace process. When the WPC arrived in the region, they did not have difficulty in finding civil society leaders to talk to. There was an already existing and they organized various meetings with the WPC. The participant recalled that the meetings had gone very smoothly and nicely. The participant noted that there is a similar response to the pandemic and said that the platform was working together with the state, the municipality, and the governor's office, trying to ensure that there was an efficient response to the crisis.

One participant who is an active civil society actor from Diyarbakır talked about the importance of civil society participation and how civil society organisations from different political backgrounds could be brought together. According to him, there are two main issues: firstly, ensuring that the process is as accessible and as pluralist as possible; and secondly, keeping the dialogue alive during challenging times when it seems like the process has completely stopped and there is little hope. Ideally, the

dialogue would continue at all levels. However, nowadays, dialogue on higher levels such as between HDP, AK Party or the government, and the PKK seems unlikely. Still, dialogue in lower levels such as within the civil society can continue. If peace is the goal, civil society members and organisations who look at issues differently and who come from different backgrounds should be brought together and work together.

The participant noted that when the peace process failed, pro-government conservative civil society organisations, following the government's lead, distanced themselves from peace initiatives. The arena was left to more left-leaning, secular organisations and some conservative, but not pro-government organisations to work on peace initiatives. Before, during the peace process, civil society gatherings used to be more representative. Nowadays, these different groups rarely come together. The participant talked about how in the previous organisations he worked in, they valued bringing people from different affiliations and backgrounds together. As a conservative, but not pro-government organization, by acting as a bridge, they prioritised enabling a dialogue between both sides. In the highly polarised environment, the number of such organisations is decreasing. The participant expressed his belief that such organisations are valuable and essential.

Giving examples from meetings that took place in the post-peace process, the participant talked about how difficult it was to convince pro-government organisations to talk about the peace process. Therefore, they came up with a different formula where more liberal-left and secular organisations, such as Memory Centre and the Peace Association, were invited to present a specific report or project to pro-government organisations, and participants were invited to discuss the presentations. Such meetings took place in Diyarbakır, Malatya and Van. The participant notes that the meetings were very fruitful. When groups that came together under such circumstances, where members of pro-government organisations felt like they could talk more freely, it became apparent that peace and conflict resolution is still a much-debated matter in pro-government civil society organisations. The participant believes that this is an important point that requires attention since the participation of all sides is crucial in every peace initiative.

One of the biggest challenges of the civil society in Turkey is that it lacks a well-established public space. During the peace process, civil society organisations had legitimacy and could contribute to the discussion, but the moment conflict restarted, the public space diminished. Therefore, civil society in Turkey can only become a prominent actor if they manage to create their own public space. According to the participant, nowadays, the government is doing civil society's job. Using the example of the Elazığ earthquake, the participant argued that the instances of the government not allowing the distribution of humanitarian aid demonstrated the government's efforts to centralise civil society. Crises, such as the COVID-19, could create opportunities for civil society, but it also could create opportunities for the government. Civil society actors need to be aware of this.

Another participant argued that the political polarisation in Turkey tends to crush the civil society initiatives in Turkey. Agreeing with the previous participant, civil society can only exist in spaces where politics allow it because an independent civil society does not exist. This situation is one of the biggest problems in Turkey and the reasons and opportunities must be examined.

Closing Remarks

DPI's Council of Experts member, academic and President of Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research (DISA), Vahap Coşkun, gave the closing remarks of the online meeting. In his speech, Coşkun focused on the role of civil society and the state of the solution process in Turkey. According to him,

the civil society in Turkey concerning the peace process can be divided into three stages. First, the period of the solution process between 2013-2015 when there was a semi-transparent process. Civil society organisations were visible in the public space and involved in the process, especially through the WPCs. Second, the period between 2015-2019 which is marked with the end of the solution process, the failed coup attempt, and the following state of emergency. During the state of emergency, the government used its powers to suppress the opposition. This resulted in the civil society retrieving from the public space. Third, the period from 2019 to present, which was marked by the sweeping wins of the opposition during local elections, civil society gained more confidence and increasingly came back to public space.



Concluding remarks by Prof Vahap Coşkun, academic and President of Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research (DISA)

In this sense, Coşkun gives the example of Diyarbakır and how during the last year there has been an increase in politics with a small 'p', focusing on youth and other groups. There have been various human rights schools, peace schools, readings focusing on women's issues. Civil society actors and organisations were increasingly coming together and discussing the current events, organising meetings focused on history, literature, and art, opening new spaces. However, with the spread of the coronavirus, this space has narrowed again.

Regarding the Kurdish issue and the resolution process, Coşkun notes that there is a lack of social environment to discuss the issue and the possibility of a new process. Topics that were lengthily discussed during the peace process are now not mentioned. He argues that Turkey is going through a period when anti-solution process voices are more vocal. He groups these voices into four. The first group is the conspiracy theorists who resort to conspiracy theories whenever there is a talk about a peace process. In this group, there are leftists, rightists, Kurds, and Turks. Often, they are not very consistent. The second group is absolutely against a solution process, against any democratic solution. It can be argued that the political existence of this group depends on the denial of a political solution. The third group is the people who later became anti-solution processes, following the government's lead. This group does not have an authentic idea about the Kurdish issue. These three groups can sometimes form alliances. Lastly, the fourth group comprises people who seem to be in favour of a solution process, but fail to take a stance in critical junctures, disturbed by the groups who are in charge of the process and afraid of the possibility of potentially benefiting them.

Coşkun also talks about people who are in favour of peace and mentions two important problems they face. Firstly, the existing legal, democratic space is rapidly narrowing, and authoritarianism is rising. Secondly, there is an increasing environment of political polarisation and labelling. Coşkun argues that these two difficulties result in two common reactions within civil society: regarding peace as a dangerous topic and using self-censorship on top of the existing censorship or dismissing peace initiatives as a waste of time.

However, even though these are challenging times, there is still a lot that can be done. Firstly, it is important to look back and critically analyse the failed peace process and learn lessons. Secondly, civil society actors should identify the necessary steps to normalise politics and prioritise democratisation. Thirdly, working on initiatives that would create a social context that would make a new peace process acceptable, doing peace advocacy. The society needs to be convinced of the need for a political solution.

Coşkun states that warring parties might not always be open to the idea of a peace process, they might prioritize other political gains. Individuals and organisations that defend a political solution do not have the luxury to wait. They need to be prepared. There are two points that civil society must be extra vigilant about. Firstly, civil society must be careful about the language they use while talking to all sides of the conflict while vocalizing demands and issues. Secondly, they need to focus on widening the pool of support for a political process.

Coşkun finished his remarks by focusing on the ways of ending the conflict. People often tend to think that the best way to end a conflict is to have a clear victory, a winner. In internal conflicts like the Kurdish issue, this mentality of having an absolute winner or loser is potentially very dangerous because when there is a wide social base, even when there is a military-based victory, there is a risk of the conflict taking other forms. The solution must be political. Right now, the lack of political process is one of the most fundamental problems. It crushes hope within society. Here, civil society has a great responsibility, and it is important to learn from each other's experiences and other conflicts.

Further Suggestions for DPI

Many participants expressed that they appreciated the opportunity to discuss such a topic under these unprecedented circumstances. Participants noted that they were going to share what they had learned with their own networks, NGOs, associations and in academic contexts. They found the session on the role of civil society in Northern Ireland to be highly informative. Many remarked time concerns and expressed the need for further meetings on the topic of civil society in Turkey. Participants noted that they valued the diverse background of the participants. Some expressed the need to have more civil society representatives from organizations closer to the government.

Three participants voiced their interest in focusing on specific civil society organisations that worked on grassroots level, listening to their experiences about the field. One participant suggested focusing on the relationship between media and civil society or politics and civil society in future meetings. Furthermore, one participant expressed interest in capacity building workshops, specifically with regards to language building. Another participant suggested discussing the legal basis of COVID-19 restrictions in relation to constitutional and legal concerns that they might pose.

Conclusion

This roundtable brought together a diverse group of civil society leaders from different political and social sections of Turkey's society. The roundtable took place during unprecedented times as the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic. Feedback from participants indicates that they found the roundtable to be very fruitful and informative. By listening to the insightful presentation delivered by Pat Hynes from the Glenree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation, the group examined the various crucial roles that civil society has played during and after the conflict in Northern Ireland. Later, participants engaged in a Q&A session where they focused on topics such as post-conflict politics, collective memory, the legacy of violence, and the future of the conflict, in relation to the different roles that civil society can play in all these discussions. During the second session, participants focused on the state of the civil society in Turkey. Here, the insights provided by civil society actors on the field resulted in a productive discussion and demonstrated a diverse range of experiences. The meeting ended with DPI's Council of Experts member Vahap Coşkun's closing remarks.

The initial feedback through formal evaluation shows that participants appreciate the opportunity to discuss such an important topic during these extraordinary times. Even though Turkey is going through challenging times, many underlined the importance of keeping channels open and the dialogue alive. Multiple participants have called for follow-up sessions with different experts, focusing on other case studies.

Overall, this meeting reinforced the importance of continuing dialogue with existing participants, as well as extending the audience and our reach with new participants. DPI remains committed to keeping dialogue alive during this time of uncertainty and in finding innovative ways to use technology and understand the openings that COVID-19 can offer conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Participant List

Ali Bayramođlu	Columnist, TV Programme at TV 5 & Member of WPC
Cuma icek	Researcher
Glseren Ona	Founder of Equality and Justice Women Platform
Hakan Tahmaz	Head of Peace Foundation
Hatem Ete	Lecturer at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt niversitesi, Ankara Institute & Perspective Editorial Coordinator
Handan Karataş	Deputy Chair of City Council of Urfa
Mkreme Avcı	Chair of the Board, İsmail Beşiki Foundation
Oral alıřlar	Columnist at Daily Posta
Öztrk Trkdođan	Chairman of Human Rights Association
Raci Bilici	Deputy Head of Human Rights Association
Reha Ruhaviođlu	Board Member of the Initiative for Rights Diyarbakır Office
Sedat Yurtdaş	Head of the Tigris Social Research Center (DITAM)
Prof Dr Sevtap Yokuş	Lecturer at Altınbaş University
Prof Dr Ufuk Uras	Lecturer at Istanbul University
Dr Vahap Coşkun	President of Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research (DISA) & Member of WPC
Yıldırım Ođur	Columnist at Daily Karar
Arild Humlen	Lawyer and Director, Norwegian Bar Association’s Legal Committee
Dr Avila Kilmurray	Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University
David Gorman	Head of Eurasia Programme, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Eleanor Johnson	Research Analyst - Eastern Mediterranean, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
James Rizzo	European Commission, Policy Officer, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement negotiations
Prof Mehmet Asutay	Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Political Economy & Finance Durham University Business School
Rajesh Rai	Lawyer; Founder, HIC & Human Energy (Uganda) Ltd; and Former Director, Joint Council for Welfare of Immigrants
Sir Kieran Prendergast	Former British Ambassador to Turkey; Senior Adviser at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue & DPI Council of Expert Member
Sema Kilicer	Political Officer, Delegation of the European Union to Turkey
HE Sonya McGuinness	Ambassador of Ireland to Turkey
Susanne Gentz	Diplomatic Adviser, Europe and Central Asia, Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy Division, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
Deniz Cebe	Interpreter
Eren Buglalilar	Interpreter
Kerim Yildiz	Chief Executive Officer, Democratic Progress Institute
Yeshim Harris	Chief Operating Officer, Democratic Progress Institute
Dr Esra Elmas	Head of Turkey Programme, Democratic Progress Institute
David Murphy	Project Officer, Democratic Progress Institute
Katya Paus	Programme Officer, Turkey Programme, Democratic Progress Institute
Ulpjana Ruka	Programme Officer, Democratic Progress Institute

