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Civil Society in Conflict Transformation: Ambivalence, Potentials and Challenges

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1. Introduction

Civic engagement and the role of social actors within the framework of the nation state is widely accepted, at least in the OECD world, in both politics and academia. The significance of civil society to international politics and in conflict settings is less agreed. The number of agencies engaged in international development policy, humanitarian aid, human rights protection and environmental policy has increased substantially over the last two decades. A similar development is witnessed in the field of conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict regeneration. However, assessments of the roles and activities of civil society actors in all these areas are contradictory and ambivalent. Controversial debates about their *capacities*, *impacts* and *legitimacy* are on-going among politicians, practitioners and scholars.

In particular, this article focuses on the potential contributions of civil society actors for peacebuilding and conflict transformation.[1] Some of the central questions addressed in this text are: What types of activities do international and transnational NGOs undertake in order to influence international politics in a way that contributes to stable peace and coping with global challenges? What potential do actors from civil society offer for war-to-peace transitions? What problems and dilemmas are faced in the development of civil society in war-torn societies? What are the limitations of civil society's contributions and how does it relate to state-building? Finally, how does any of this impact on theoretical conceptualisations of the term "civil society"?

By way of elaborating these questions, the *second* section of this article discusses various terms and definitions linked to debates about civil society. The *third* section gives a general overview of NGO activities at the international and regional level. The *fourth* section presents a critical assessment of their roles and the *fifth* section deals with their impact and legitimacy. The *sixth* section addresses the potential contributions of civil society in war-torn societies and post-conflict peacebuilding, with specific reference to the last 10 years of experience in the Balkans. The *seventh* section contextualises the development of civil society in relation to the challenges of state-building and investigates the theoretical implications of this relationship for conceptualising the term "civil society". The *eighth* section draws some central conclusions, makes policy recommendations and identifies the needs for further research.

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1 In 1976, the peace researcher Johan Galtung introduced the term "peacebuilding". Former UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali revived the term in his Agenda for Peace. Here, peacebuilding is used as a catch-all term referring to a variety of activities designed to build or maintain stable peace and development. It includes post-conflict peacebuilding, early warning, prevention, external interventions and initiatives taken by local actors. It also may include economic development, social justice, reconciliation, empowerment of disadvantaged or strategic groups and humanitarian support.

2. Terms of Reference

In academic literature and development discourses, different terms and acronyms are used to describe the topic of discussion. International relations theory introduces the term *non-state actors (NSAs)*, which includes all actors on the international level that are not states. This definition reflects the assumptions of realism theories which assert that interactions between states are the central relationships of interest in studying international policy. NSAs in international relations theory include non-governmental organisations, firms and businesses, especially multinational corporations, the international media, international organised crime and mafia-type actors, and international paramilitary and terrorist groups.

The term non-state actors is also used in development cooperation, especially after the Cotonou Agreement between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Here it refers to a wide range of non-government development actors whose participation in ACP-EU cooperation has been formally recognized. According to Article 6 of the Agreement, non-state actors include "civil society in all its diversity, according to national characteristics; economic and social partners, including trade union organisations and; the private sector". In order to join the partnership, non-state actors must respond to social needs, possess competencies for development purposes, and have internal organisational structures that are transparent and democratic (European Commission 2006).

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are usually referred to as "non-state, non-profit orientated groups who pursue purposes of public interest", excluding the private sector (Schmidt and Take 1997). The term, which has been comprehensively conceptualised by the World Bank, is used widely in the field of development cooperation. Operational Directive 14.70 of the World Bank defines NGOs as "private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development" (World Bank 2001). More broadly, the term is applicable to any non-profit organisation that is independent from government. According to the World Bank, NGOs are "value-based organizations which depend, in whole or in part, on charitable donations and voluntary service" and "principles of altruism and voluntarism remain key defining characteristics". The World Bank differentiates two main categories of NGOs with which it cooperates: 1) *operational* NGOs, the primary purpose of which is the design and implementation of development-related projects, and 2) *advocacy* NGOs, the primary purpose of which is to defend and/or promote a specific cause and seek to influence the policies and practices of international organisations. Operational NGOs are further classified as: a) *national organisations* operating in specific developing countries, and b) *international organisations*, which typically are headquartered in developed countries, but carry out operations in more than one developing country, and c) *community-based organisations* (CBOs) serving a specific population in a narrow geographical area. CBOs, according to this classification, are also referred to as grassroots organisations or peoples' organisations which are distinct in both nature and purpose from other NGOs; while national and international organisations are seen as "intermediary" NGOs that are formed to serve others, CBOs are normally "membership" organisations made up of a group of individuals who have joined together to further their own interests, e.g. women's groups, credit circles, youth clubs, cooperatives and farmers' associations.

In recent years, another term has also gained importance in the literature on peacebuilding and conflict transformation: *civil society organisations (CSOs)*. Likewise has it been adopted by international organisations. The World Bank, too, now uses this term to refer "to non-governmental

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and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. This includes a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations" (www.worldbank.org/ngo).

The advantage of the term "civil society organisations" is that it has an even broader scope and more positive connotations than the terms discussed above. However, it is also important to recognize that this breadth of definition renders discussion of its meaning even more elusive. In particular, it often remains unclear whether the term is linked to a *normative notion* or used as an *analytic concept* (*see section 7*).

There is no commonly-agreed definition of what "civil society" is, neither in the development community nor in academic debates, which focuses on the impact of civil society on democratisation, power balances and civilisation within a polity at the national level (Burnell and Calvert 2004, and especially White 2004; Whitehead 2004) and global governance at the international level (Richmond and Carey 2005, especially Richmond 2005; Burbridge 1997). Amidst these disagreements, there is one point of consensus: that civil society is the arena of voluntary collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values, an "intermediate associated realm between state and family populated by organisations which are separate from the state and enjoy autonomy from the state" (White 2004, 10). Merkel and Lauth (1998, 7) distinguish a *political sphere* (state administration, political parties and parliaments), *economic sphere* (business and companies) and *private sphere*, defining civil society as the space where all these overlap. They suggest that civil society is "the space in between" social actors, meaning that actors can be related to specific sectors, but occasionally also act in "civil society". As Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) argue, this is the most suitable definition of the term for the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding because this interpretation helps to identify social actors from non-Western and different cultural settings, like traditional groups in Africa, as civil society members.

Given this diverse range of competing and overlapping terms, it is important here to specify the particular definitions appropriated in the text that follows. To this end, the term "NGOs" refers to non-profit organisations active in development and humanitarian aid, human rights advocacy and peace work on international, regional and local levels. In contrast, the term "civil society" is used as a broader concept related to the activities of state-building.

3. Activities of NGOs at the International and Regional Level[2]

Antecedents of present-day international NGOs already were emerging in the 19th century, when the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was founded and non-state actors began to fight for a range of issues: voting rights for women, international law and disarmament, ending the slave trade, and so on. After World War II, NGOs engaged not only in humanitarian areas, but also played an important role in identifying the need for human rights to be included in the UN Charter and, more generally, to develop the UN Human Rights System. For example, they provided input into the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and influenced the anti-

2 The following overview was prepared as a contribution for the International Conference „Strategies for Peace", held by the German Foundation for Peace Research, 28/29 June 2006 in Osnabrück, Germany (conference documentation forthcoming).

discrimination policies of the United Nations. (For an overview see Richmond 2005; Alger 2005; Klein 2002; Debiel and Sticht 2005.)

Especially during the last two decades, the number of NGOs in human rights protection, international development policy, humanitarian aid and environmental policy has substantially increased. According to the Human Development Report of the United Nations (UNDP 2003, 3), for example, the estimated number of NGOs active in the fields of development, human rights, security and peace politics is approximately 37,000 to 50,000. In their larger numbers, NGOs play an important role in mobilising a diverse number of campaigns and activities. For instance, they support the International Climate Convention, work on designing adequate instruments for poverty reduction, create better conditions for human rights and justice, and support the International Criminal Court.

There are four central explanations for the increasing number and significance of NGOs. According to Debiel and Sticht (2005, 133f.) these include:

1. The UN World Conferences of the 1990s have offered major incentives for the establishment of new NGOs and the expansion of existing organisations engaged in development and environmental issues at the international level.
2. The increasing power of mass media and the globalisation of communication by electronic information technologies supports transnational networking activities of non-state actors.
3. International civil society organisations function as substitutes for former state-driven welfare services (health, education and social policy), as a consequence of the neo-liberal project of decreasing state activities in this field. Leftist criticism of the authoritarian state meets conservative arguments of criticism against the welfare state.
4. In many developing countries, NGOs function as substitutes for formerly state-run activities in health and education, especially as international programmes for economic reforms, like IMF programmes, forced states to reduce public services.

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A main cause for the expansion of NGO activity appears to be the growing practice of international and national development agencies to channel development aid through NGOs. Commenting on the exponential rise in NGO activities in both developed and developing countries, a World Bank report notes that, "From 1970 to 1985 total development aid disbursed by international NGOs increased ten-fold. In 1992 international NGOs channelled over $7.6 billion of aid to developing countries. It is now estimated that over 15 percent of total overseas development aid is channelled through NGOs. While statistics about global numbers of NGOs are notoriously incomplete, it is currently estimated that there is somewhere between 6,000 and 30,000 national NGOs in developing countries. CBOs [Community-Based Organisations] across the developing world number in the hundreds of thousands" (World Bank 2001).

NGOs also have been increasingly active in conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding activities (Barnes 2005; Paffenholz and Spurk 2006). For example, they are engaged in early warning activities, preventive diplomacy through third-party intervention, facilitation of dialogue workshops and mediation, negotiations (peacemaking), networking and initiatives for cross-cultural understanding and relationship building. Each of these activities is explained in turn below.

Early warning activities include analysis and development of communication strategies that raise public awareness for emerging crises. There are also joint initiatives between state and non-state actors oriented to improving early warning systems on a global level. In the late 1990s, for example, UN organisations, research institutions and NGOs (International Alert, UK, the

PIOOM Foundation, NL, the Russian Academy of Sciences and Institute of Ethnology, the US-American Council on Foreign Relations, York University, Canada, and swisspeace) founded a Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER). Through its FAST programme, the Swiss research institute, swisspeace, has been a standard-setter in developing early warning methodology, monitoring programmes in the Americas, Africa and Asia. The International Crisis Group delivers regular background reports and briefings on conflict zones. CARE International has launched several community-based early warning systems in high-risk areas of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. In Africa, the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is setting the stage for a civil society-based initiative called Warning and Response Network (WARN) that will operate in 12 of the 15 member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa is also a key organisation in early warning analysis and crisis reporting in Africa. (For an overview see Suifon 2005; Austin 2004.)

Other NGOs are active in *preventive diplomacy* (multi-track diplomacy, and in particular Track 1,5 interventions), as for instance International Alert (UK), the Carter Center (US) and its International Negotiation Network (developed by the Carter Center), and the church-related Community of Sant' Egidio. Some also have participated in *peacemaking processes*. In the cases of Northern Ireland, Guatemala and South Africa, civil society actors have effectively facilitated broader public participation in peace agreement negotiations, thus influencing such processes (Fitzduff and Church 2004). Cooperation between governments and NGOs has been practised in various conflict zones. Perhaps the most well known is the cooperation between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Institute for Applied Social Science to form the 'Norwegian Channel' that led to the Oslo Accord of 1994.

In war times, NGOs *contribute to maintaining or improving relationships by fostering action across conflict lines and ethnic divides* through informal exchanges and joint projects. NGOs working at regional levels (sometimes with support from international NGOs) for example, have played a significant role in maintaining relationships across the front lines and newly-established borders during and after the wars in former Yugoslavia (Large 1998).

NGOs also have specialised in *post-conflict regeneration and peacebuilding*. Comprehensive documentations of CSO contributions to peacebuilding are published regularly by the European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation (van Tongeren et al. 2005; van Tongeren 1998; European Centre for Conflict Prevention 1999). The international literature offers various taxonomies of a range of NGO functions in this context (Ropers 2002):

- Establishing alternative media, war and peace reporting
- Monitoring of elections and state institutions and activities related to democratisation
- Youth work (community-based social policy, income generation, education and empowerment)
- Support for education sector reforms and initiatives for peace education
- Establishing peace cultures: incentives for overcoming cultures of war via arts, music, films and cultural events
- Strengthening local "peace constituencies"
- Initiatives for inter-religious dialogue
- Empowerment of women, campaigns for women's rights and against human trafficking
- Initiatives for demobilisation, disarmament and demilitarisation
- Protection of endangered individuals, and providing security for minority groups or refugees and returnees
- Re-integration of returnees and community building
- Human rights monitoring

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- Documentation of war crimes, fact-finding and support to identify missing people
- Dealing with trauma and psycho-social support for war victims, refugees and returnees
- Initiatives for dealing constructively with the past (fact-finding, story-telling, reconciliation initiatives)

International NGOs, political foundations and local communities have created partnerships with, and support programmes for, groups and individuals in conflict-torn societies in order to enable conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Furthermore, many NGOs work to lobby, monitor and influence the policy of governments and international organisations in international crisis management, aiming to raise public awareness for the needs of war-torn societies.

In the process of globalisation, NGOs tend to organise themselves in regional or world-wide networks. Many of these are active at the UN-level, with others focused at the European and other regional levels or at the national level (Serbin 2005). Several relevant examples are presented below.

1. The *Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)* is a network of NGOs and regional NGO platforms involved in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. They held their first global conference at UN headquarters in New York in July 2005. The mission of this Partnership is to facilitate the exchange of information and experience among participating organisations, as well as to stimulate cooperation and synergy with UN organisations. GPPAC was initiated in 2002 by the European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) as a civil society process to generate a global agenda for the prevention of armed conflict in response to the UN Secretary General's 2001 *Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict*. It aims "to support a shift from reaction to prevention" within the politics of the UN and its member states (van Tongeren et al. 2005, 3). Fifteen regional processes have developed separate action agendas to reflect principles and priorities for their respective regions. Building from these proposals, GPPAC has developed a Global Action Agenda which was presented at the global civil society conference at UN headquarters. The secretariat is hosted by the ECCP, which also coordinates the European Platform for Conflict Prevention.

2. The *European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation* was established in 1997 and consists of approximately 150 European organisations and national NGO platforms working in the field of conflict prevention or peacebuilding in the international arena. Its mission is to facilitate the exchange of information and experience among participating organisations, as well as to stimulate cooperation and synergy.

3. The *European Peace Liaison Office (EPLO)* was set up in 1999 by some members of the European Platform. Its initial impetus came from the EU liaison office of the Quaker Peace Service. The rationale of this project is two-fold: to improve the representation of conflict transformation NGOs vis-à-vis European Union institutions; and to enhance access to information for member NGOs. Involving approximately 20 different NGOs, EPLO has four main working groups: 1) Funding for Peace; 2) Civil Interventions for Sustainable Peace; 3) Peacebuilding, Development and Gender; and 4) Peacebuilding and Security. The group also maintains close cooperation with Concord, the European-level network of development NGOs.

Cooperation with NGOs also has been actively encouraged by state actors and international organisations, especially by the UN and EU, as such organisations have vital knowledge about societies in conflict zones. Since the late 1990s, for example, EU parliamentarians began holding regular meetings with NGOs in the Human Rights Contact Group, Civil Society Contact Group, Common Foreign and Security Policy Contact Group and Arms Transfer Working Group in

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Brussels. New forums for information exchange and consultancy between state and non-state actors and policy networks have emerged, generating rich expertise on a range of significant topics. This cooperation also has influenced the EU's conflict prevention and development policy: it may be asserted that causes of conflict have been taken into consideration much more than before in documents and programmes (Debiel and Fischer 2000).

NGOs have created *networks and campaigns lobbying for arms exports control and raising public awareness of the economic dynamics that fuel war economies*. NGOs joining the region-wide platform European Solidarity Towards Equal Participation, or Eurostep (all of them maintain offices in Brussels) have worked to sensitise EU institutions on the necessity of undertaking self-critical policy assessments of the trade in wood, diamonds and oil because it may prolong wars and war economies. Evidence indicates, for example, that many armed groups in African countries depend on selling such resources to buy armaments. The International Diamond Campaign has put pressure on politicians and private companies to avoid trade with diamonds that contributes to financing war, as it has been the case for instance in Angola. In 1998, 100 NGOs founded the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), which aims to limit the proliferation of small arms and reduce illegal arms trading. It is, then, pressure from NGO networks that has resulted in EU organisations, among others, becoming more politically focused on these issues in recent years (ibid.).

In the light of this overview, it is impossible to deny that NGOs have gained more and more ground in influencing international politics. Likewise they are now more readily accepted by state agencies and international state organisations as cooperation partners. As Ricigliano (2003, 459) argues, cooperation between Track I and Track II actors is growing because such collaboration advances the self-interests of each actor. However, assessments of NGO roles in international politics are ambivalent – sometimes even contradictory. In particular, scholars and practitioners have raised controversial debates on the role, impact and legitimacy of NGOs and their activities.

4. Ambivalent Assessments of NGO Roles and Activities

Many commentators and observers regard increased levels of NGO engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as a positive development. There are a range of reasons for this. For example, NGO cooperation with international organisations helps highlight formerly under-represented and/or marginalised issues, as well as makes decision-making processes more transparent. They also contribute to a "global public sphere" and "increase the repertoire of international politics by cross-border activities such as protest campaigns, symbolic actions and civil resistance and last but not least NGOs contribute to democratisation of the UN-System" (Klein 2002, 3). Some scholars see the expanding NGO sector and international cross-border engagement as a result of an emerging "global civil society" (Kössler and Melber 1993; Colás 2002; Scholte 2002; Kaldor 2003; Keane 2003; Richmond 2005). This is defined as being guided by the values of solidarity, participation and empathy, which are oriented to supporting processes of civilisation and nonviolent conflict resolution. Other commentators emphasise the point that peace policy in particular cannot be left to politicians and diplomats alone (Zartman and Rasmussen 1997).

Both academics and practitioners identify comparative advantages that appear to better equip non-state actors for peacebuilding activities. Some of the strengths of NGOs in this regard include their political independence, the flexibility of their mandates, their impartiality and high

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standards of credibility.[3] Van Tongeren (1998, 23), coordinator of the European Platform for Conflict Prevention, elaborates this: "Collectively, NGOs have the ability to a) function without being constrained by narrow mandates of foreign policy imperatives, b) achieve access to areas inaccessible to official actors, c) talk to several parties without losing their credibility, d) deal directly with grassroots populations, e) operate in confidentiality without media, parliamentary or public scrutiny, f) take the greatest risks, given their public advocacy and social-justice agendas, g) effectively network, given their longstanding relationships, built on trust, with civil society in the conflict zones, h) draw upon public opinion to galvanize political will to focus on a longer-term perspective than governments are able to." Generally, NGOs can do things that governments cannot, such as "facilitate the development of new and creative ideas, provide a trusted but informal channel of communication, and expand networks of contacts, especially to groups or individuals that governments may be precluded from meeting with because of political or legal concerns" (Ricigliano 2003, 459).

At the same time, however, others discuss the ambivalent roles NGOs play in conflict settings. It is obvious that states, international state organisations and companies remain the dominant political actors. National or international state organisations use the expertise, knowledge and efficiency and also the public acceptance of NGOs (Brunnengräber et al. 2001) to increase legitimacy of their own political agendas. Richmond (2005, 19) argues that NGOs are crucial in building institutions that promote "liberal peace" from the bottom up, including free market economies and development strategies, social reform, political democratisation, human rights and humanitarian assistance. They are part of a "peacebuilding consensus" that includes donors, major states, international governmental organisations and international financial institutions, becoming part of the external governance of post-conflict zones. However, this development is marked by several dilemmas: the idea of liberal peace gives rise to a situation in which non-state actors "may concur with its crusading aspect, perhaps even legitimating the use of force for the end of reproducing the liberal order. … Often human rights violations or a lack of human security provides the basis for both state and non-state forms of intervention, whereby the governance of the state and existence of civil society comes to depend upon outside actors" (ibid., 32).

Going beyond the problem of ambivalence, others take a far more critical stance on NGOs. There are five central criticisms (for an overview see Reimann 2005; Debiel and Sticht 2005), which can be summarised as follows:

- NGOs are not "independent" *per se*, but often state-driven
- The performance of NGOs has changed because of the requirements of donor markets and mass media
- International NGOs of Western origin are dominant in comparison to others, often exporting and imposing concepts that are inadequate in relation to social realities in other countries
- Some international NGOs that are driven by external state actors or non-state actors are seen to interfere with the internal affairs of sovereign states
- NGOs are not subject to any democratic controls and thus lack legitimacy

It is important to clarify some of the issues at stake in these criticisms.

With respect to the first argument (*lack of independence*), it is documented that public financing of development NGOs doubled between 1995 and 2001, increasing from US$ 3.1 billion to US$ 7.2 billion (Debiel and Sticht 2005, 134, based on OECD-DAC Reports). This suggests that

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3 Some have even argued that it is up to global civil society to "save the world", struggling for sustainability, development, human rights and peace (see AtKisson 1997).

NGOs can function as private branches of governments which practice outsourcing of services to these organisations. In both Europe and the US, for example, approximately 50% of NGO activities are financed by public funding. There is a clear danger, then, that NGOs are merely implementing state-driven policies. However, receiving public funding does not mean that NGOs automatically loose their ability to monitor and criticise state politics. At least in European democracies, for example, both funding by state agencies and criticism of official state politics is simultaneously possible, which is borne out in the realities of state-non-state cooperation in the recent past and present.

The second argument (*change of performance*) relates to the observation that in Western societies there has been such an explosion of NGOs that they now constitute a type of "third sector", a new labour market. This is apart from, and in addition to, civil society, which consists of traditional social movements, associations, etc. Such tendencies also are apparent in developing countries and post-war societies. In some cases, NGOs are merely commercial service providers. Since the late 1990s, there is on-going lively scholarly and practical debate on this issue, including extended discussion of the bifurcation of NGOs into either one of two categories: movement-oriented or service-providing (Duffield 1997; Ropers 2002; Weiss 1998; Wahl 1997). The danger that NGOs respond to money in the first instance, instead of responding to social needs, is serious, both for international and local NGOs (*see section 5*).

The third argument (*Western dominance*) points to uneven access to finances, media and qualified staff, etc., demonstrating that "international civil society" is traced through with structures of Western privilege. In particular, this creates power imbalances and differential capacities, for example, in relation to setting agendas, putting issues and/or grievances on the agendas of both politics and the media. Western and Northern NGOs, for instance, often focus on *political* human rights, whereas those from the Global South tend to emphasise *social* human rights (Klein 2002, 4). A further criticism suggests that in some cases, by engaging in inadequate behaviour, NGO personnel contribute to the establishment of cultures of dominance and subordination, as well as disregard local ownership (Reich 2006). Western NGOs also tend to apply technocratic versions of conflict resolution. One argument is that they transfer Western concepts of civil society to other contexts and impose these on other cultures. When applied in development and transformation countries, this can hamper efforts to strengthen state institutions.

The fourth argument (*potential NGO influence and interference in the internal affairs of government*) makes an important point, but also contains elements of ambiguity. This criticism asserts that the threats and risks of interference into the internal affairs of governments by international NGOs in particular must be taken seriously. Specifically, concern must be given to this potential problem because these NGOs mainly tend to operate in countries in transition, states in crisis, and/or developing countries in the Global South. State agencies, non-state donors or lobby groups might, for example, fund private agencies and associations in order to manipulate or enhance changes to the political order in their zones of interest. Cases of political exploitation have been reported. A relevant example is the resolution against Israel that was formulated by several NGOs at the "World Conference against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance" in Durban in September 2001 (Klein 2002).

It is necessary to acknowledge that individual and isolated cases of bad practice, political interference and abuse of resources do exist in the NGO world. But it is essential not to overestimate the case. There are equally serious mitigating factors at play. It should also be recognized, for example, that sometimes the argument of "illegitimate or unauthorised interference" is clearly being used by extremist parties to conflicts or by political leaders to criticise and/or prevent various types of peaceful intervention that are against their interests. They tend to criticise external assistance for

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peacebuilding efforts, along with civil society in general, as interventionist forces. Most weak states have a strong tendency to protect their sovereignty – and for good reasons, too. At the same time, however, this argument is often misused to limit "legitimate", serious and well-intended forms of engagement.

The fifth argument (*lack of legitimacy, transparency and credibility*) is an important but questionable one. Unlike governments and parliaments, non-state actors are of course unable to obtain legitimacy through public elections. But the conclusion that therefore NGOs in general are marked by a lack of legitimacy is unconvincing (Beisheim 1997; 2005). As both scholars and practitioners from global NGO networks rightly argue, while NGOs are important players in the international arena, their power is quite limited in comparison to state administrations, parliaments and/or the business community. NGOs may function as powerful pressure groups but they do not make decisions that are obligatory or legally binding for entire societies. In short, NGOs do not have the legal, political or military power of states. Non-profit organisations also do not have huge reserves of financial power compared to private companies. Instead, many of them depend on funds from charitable foundations and private donors, and thus on the acceptance of public opinion. This is particularly true for those NGOs who engage in the fields of human rights protection and conflict transformation. Rather, as Barnes (2005, 13) articulates the perspective of GPPAC members, they have only "the power to persuade, to propose solutions rooted in their analysis of the problems, and to influence by example and by the integrity of their moral voice." They should therefore be assessed and measured according to their performance and contribution to this "public competition on acceptance" (Klein 2002, 4).

NGOs engaged in development, human rights, peacebuilding and conflict transformation activities can acquire legitimacy and increased credibility mainly by demonstrating their efficiency and effectiveness as this is defined by clear purposes and mandates. Many NGOs have developed transparent systems of reporting about finances and funding, making this information publicly available in annual reports and on homepages. Many of them also have fostered practices of transparency in relation to their internal decision-making processes. Many bigger NGOs have developed evaluation tools that allow them to engage in self-reflexive debates about their own potentials and limitations. In particular, some larger-scale peace-related NGO platforms and networks have started discussions about how to improve their monitoring and evaluation tools so as to better assess the impact of their activities and thereby improve their conflict transformation practices. In general, however, a broad and transparent system of reporting on successes, failures and lessons learned is still lacking. Importantly, this is a deficit that applies equally to government agencies and international organisations.

5. Gaining Legitimacy by Self-Reflection, Impact Assessment and Effective Action

Development agencies traditionally have assumed that their work in general makes an automatic contribution to peace. Now, however, they have begun a self-critical debate on how to avoid negative outcomes and unintended side effects. Anderson's (1999) assertion of "do no harm" as a guiding principle for humanitarian and development intervention is a response to studies arguing that the transfer of money and goods by humanitarian and development agencies could serve to prolong war economies, contribute to warlords' resources and/or cause distortions of

local economies. Civil society actors have added to this debate, calling for conflict sensitivity in humanitarian aid and development policy, with some of them revising their programmes in light of recent experiences.

In particular, NGOs active in peacebuilding and conflict transformation also are debating how to develop common standards and principles ("codes of conduct") in the field of peace work. In this respect, some useful expertise has been developed in joint endeavours by scholars and practitioners. Examples of this include the War-Torn Societies Project in cooperation with the UN, lessons-learned workshops organised by the European Centre for Conflict Prevention and the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP) set up in 1999 by the Collaborative for Development Action (Cambridge, MA) and the Life & Peace Institute (Uppsala, Sweden) (Anderson and Olson 2003). Several studies on impact assessment have also been undertaken in recent years (Church and Shouldice 2002, 2003; Smith 2003; Austin, Fischer and Wils 2003; Paffenholz and Reychler 2005).

Compared to development and humanitarian organisations, peace organisations typically do not transfer extraordinary sums of money and goods to zones of crisis. However, as their evaluation and self-reflection processes indicate, even well-intentioned intervention strategies aimed at peacebuilding and conflict transformation can have unintended negative impacts. For example, the RPP process identifies *six categories of negative impacts*[4]: 1) worsening divisions between conflicting groups; 2) increasing danger for participants in peace activities; 3) reinforcing structural or overt violence; 4) diverting human and material resources from productive peace activities; 5) increasing cynicism; and 6) disempowering local people. Such negative results have been well documented (see Anderson and Olson 2003; Sorbo et al. 1997) and there is great awareness that these have to be avoided, particularly in cultures of dominance, situations of long-term dependence and in relation to duplicated or wasted resources. (Although these findings grow out of a self-reflective process of civil society actors, they are also equally relevant for interventions conducted by state agencies.)

In addition to examining negative impacts, the RPP process also centres on the question of how to identify positive results. In fact, most NGOs have far greater difficulty defining *criteria for success* and *positive impacts*. A central problem with this is that there are no fast results in peace work, which requires long-term engagement. Further, assessing an agency's contribution to the bigger context is difficult because most peacebuilding programmes are discrete efforts aimed at affecting one (often small) piece of the puzzle. Quite simply, no one project can do everything. Although output is well documented in many cases, nonetheless the outcomes and effects of peace work remain difficult to assess. The attribution of social impacts to specific peace activities is an even more complicated challenge.

RPP's review of peace practices identifies two levels of effectiveness. The *first* relates to the *Programme Level*: "At this level, agencies assess the effectiveness of a specific activity (e.g. peace education, dialogue workshop, income generation project) in achieving its intended goals. Program evaluation at this level is often done regularly by agencies, even if not always systematically." The *second* is called the *"Peace Writ Large"*. In terms of effectiveness, the question here is whether, in meeting specific programme goals, an agency makes a contribution to the bigger picture: "This requires assessing changes in the overall environment that may or may not result from the project or program."[5]

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[4] Issue paper on Negative Impacts published by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), www.cdainc.com/rpp/negative_impacts.php.
[5] Criteria of Effectiveness, online at www.cdainc.com/rpp/criteria_of_effectiveness.php.

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Resulting from their RPP evaluation process, the Collaborative for Development Action has proposed *five criteria of effectiveness*, including:[6] 1) stopping a key driving factor of the war or conflict; 2) creating a momentum for peace by enabling participants and communities to develop their own peace initiatives in relation to critical elements of context analysis; 3) establishing new or reforming existing political institutions to handle grievances; 4) increasingly empowering people to resist violence and provocations to violence; and 5) enhancing the sense of both public and private security. The search for common criteria to measure outcomes and impacts promoted by the RPP process appears both highly useful and extremely challenging. Minimally, it serves to make practitioners aware that every organisation must discuss and formulate some criteria designed to improve planning procedures. This includes setting up short-, mid- and long-term goals in a transparent and mutually-agreed way by the individuals and groups involved.

The RPP process also indicates a need for more effective ways of linking international NGOs with local organisations. This insight also has been further developed by scholars in the US and Western Europe. For example, Ricigliano (2003; 2005), Director of the Institute of World Affairs (Washington, DC), argues that organisations in the peacebuilding field must take a holistic approach to their work which combines traditionally distinct disciplines such as human rights, humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, environment, conflict resolution, security and the rule of law in order to be more effective in today's complex conflicts. In particular, he proposes a concept of a "Network of Effective Action" as a set of practices for collaboration that is capable of facilitating integrated approaches to peacebuilding both on the ground and in terms of the theoretical development of the field.

Finally, an important insight of the RPP process is that *external interventions* can only contribute to peacebuilding if they *strive for strengthening local capacities* and if they are using a very modest approach, being aware of the limits of third-party intervention and external influence on peace processes.

Nonetheless, questions remain. *Which local actors must be addressed? What are the potentials and limitations of building civil society in war-torn societies? How is this related to state-building processes?* These and other similar questions guide the remarks that follow.

6. The Potential of Civil Society in War-torn Societies

6.1 Experiences from post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina

"Strengthening Civil Society" is established as a key element of some external interventions and missions in post-conflict situations. It is applied both by international organisations and international NGOs based on the expectation that civil society will contribute both to democratisation processes and conflict transformation. Since the mid 1990s, the importance of civil society initiatives is increasingly acknowledged in peacebuilding discourses, especially given the failures of international intervention efforts in Somalia, Rwanda or the Balkans (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006, 2). There is great emphasis on the assumption of civil society's emancipatory functions. In NGO discourses, civil society is seen as "one of the crucial underpinnings for strengthening the capacity of societies to manage conflict peacefully. This is particularly true when individuals are members of multiple groups, each of which addresses different aspects of their

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6 Issue Paper on Criteria of Effectiveness, online at www.cdainc.com/publications/rpp/effectiveness_criteria.php

concerns – such as their communal identity, vocational interests and hobbies, social and political values, and neighbourhood environment" (Barnes 2005, 10). Cross-cutting memberships among civil society actors are expected to create "bridging social capital": networks that are a powerful force in integrating society and minimizing the potential for polarisation along any specific divide. Civil society often is understood as a solution to social, economic and political problems, not only by grassroots practitioners but also by international organisations. But there is a risk that this view overestimates the scope of social actors and neglects the complexity of needs in war-to-peace transition, especially in situations where different processes of transformation overlap. This became obvious in the Balkans where post-conflict regeneration challenges coincided with transformation of the economic and political system. Based on experiences from post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, some dilemmas of strengthening civil society in relation to peacebuilding efforts can be elaborated.

After the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in 1995, Bosnia has become a kind of "pilot project for international governance" in the context of a "global domestic policy" (Ehrke 2003, 153), which views the establishment of democracy and market economy as a prerequisite for conflict resolution and the prevention of violence.[7] In the Dayton Peace Agreement, the issue of civil society largely has been ignored. Rather, international organisations have followed a strategy that can be characterised as a "liberalisation first" approach (Schneckener 2005). This focuses on the privatisation of formerly-socialised property so as to adapt the country to the requirements of international finance institutions. However, evidence suggests that this approach has not been successful, either in terms of state-building or peacebuilding. Moreover, the decision to establish a power-sharing model under conditions of a semi-protectorate has proved to be highly problematic.

On the one hand, a serious problem with the strategy has been that nationalist hardliners on all sides have remained in power as a consequence of the (too) early elections (Paris 2004, 111; Schneckener 2003, 66). On the other, the international High Representative was not equipped with any powers for sanctions against destructive political actions during the first few years after the Dayton Agreement. This created a situation whereby ethnopolitical hardliners could increase their powers, which had been legitimised by democratic institutions and the newly established power-sharing structures. As a consequence of the Dayton constitution, weak state institutions have been set up. Bosnia's political system is based on two powerful sub-state "entities": the Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS), and a presidency at state level, consisting of a Bosniak, Bosnian-Croat and Bosnian-Serb representative. The presidency is responsible for policy implementation at state level.[8] In comparison with the entities, the government at state level has hardly any power. The situation is further complicated as the entities are marked by highly distinctive political and administrative structures. The RS has a centralist system whereas the Bosniak-Croat FBiH adheres to a federalist model and is structured in cantons. On all these levels, different parliaments and decision-making processes exist.

From the very beginning, the power of central state structures was marginalised in favour of the more powerful entity institutions. This subsequently opened the door to spoiling and the postponement of important reforms (e.g. in the education and security sectors). Alongside this, economic liberalisation fostered corruption in privatisation processes. Sadly, international intervention did not provide for a coherent development strategy. This contributed to a lack of trust and confidence of citizens in democratic institutions (Fischer 2006c).

7 Through the Peace Implementation Council and the Office of High Representative in Bosnia, the international community is in fact performing the functions of a sovereign.
8 The members of the Presidency are the supreme representatives of their ethnic group and commanders-in-chief of their armed forces. However, they have no power to appoint or dismiss ministers.

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In general, international intervention in Bosnia has been defined by a notable lack of coordination, as well as an absence of any clear assessment of the causes and dynamics of the war. In particular, the persistent war economy and the close connection between economic interests and interest in maintaining ethnopolitical borders and state fragmentation were ignored or underestimated. In short, international strategies (and the presence of international organisations in the region) have guaranteed an absence of war in Bosnia, but unfortunately have not lead to progress in facilitating state integration and democratisation. Neither has there been any significant progress in conflict transformation.

By the late 1990s, frustration over backlashes and the on-going lack of democratisation led international organisations to a shift in strategy. For the first time, the issue of building civil society was put on the agenda by international organisations like the EU and the OSCE, along with the donor community. From 1998, more funding was given to projects undertaken by NGOs in the hope that the entrenched fronts on the political level could be challenged by encouraging development at the grassroots. In this way, the top-down approach of the Dayton Peace Agreement was supplemented, to some extent, with a bottom-up approach (Schneckener 2003, 61). This new grassroots-oriented approach has been welcomed as a long-term international commitment to democratic transition in Bosnia. But it also could be seen as the expression of a more disillusioned approach to democratisation (Chandler 2004, 240).

As a result of this shift in strategy, literally hundreds of civil society initiatives and NGOs have emerged.[9] The entire cultural and media scene had developed massive momentum, and civil society peacebuilding gained significance for international organisations (for an overview see Belloni 2001; Fagan 2005). Civil society initiatives have been undertaken in peace education, the empowerment of women, fostering inter-religious dialogue, dealing constructively with the past and the documentation of war crimes. Some of these efforts have contributed to overcoming cultures of violence, crossing ethnic borders and resisting separation (Fischer 2006). Others have focused on monitoring elections, state institutions and corruption (Transparency International BiH 2004). Community-based youth initiatives also have worked to involve future generations in order to overcome rampant apathy and passivity (Fischer and Fischer 2003). Reform-oriented NGOs have addressed problems in the education sector, especially the issues of participation and democratisation in schools (Emrich and Rickerts 2006). Still others have successfully motivated young people to take responsibility as citizens in their communities, fostering the feeling that engaged individuals can effect change. At the same time, these diverse initiatives have contributed to intercultural learning and empowering people to constructively manage separatist political agendas (Fischer 2006d).

Despite these myriad projects, civil society initiatives explicitly dedicated to peacebuilding, conflict transformation or human rights monitoring are still rare in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Nonetheless, there has been activity on documenting human rights abuses, fact-finding and raising awareness for individual and collective responsibility for the war and war crimes. Such efforts aim to constructively deal with the past in order to prevent future outbreaks of violence and to motivate society to confront the causes of war. Some have become active in cross-border peace education, striving to establish norms of tolerance, putting pressure on institutions to deal with prejudices and enemy images, as well as raising awareness of collective responsibility for the past in order to counteract collective amnesia

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9 The NGO Information and Support Center (CIP), established in 1997 with support from the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of OSCE (ODIHR), provides information on approximately 300 non-governmental, non-profit and non-political organisations in Bosnia (see www.geocities.com/cip_sarajevo/onama-eng.html). For an overview of all international and local NGOs working in Bosnia, see the website of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), www.icva-bh.org, and ICVA's annual directories.

and apathy (Fischer 2006b). In 2005, for example, four NGOs from Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro and Croatia elaborated a joint strategy for dealing with the past.[10]

Practitioners' experience shows that people in the region want to address the past and are searching for opportunities to ask questions and join discussions on these topics, even if remembering is a painful process for them (Fischer 2006b). Overall, they feel that there is still a long way to go to achieve coexistence, tolerance and lasting peace. Some progress recently has been made, following the publication of a video that showed the killing of several young Bosniaks in the Treskavica mountains by soldiers belonging to an elite unit of the state of Yugoslavia (Scorpions). This reveals that the Srebrenica massacre was not solely committed by Bosnian-Serb militia, but also actively involved troops from Yugoslavia. The video was broadcast by all public TV stations in Bosnia and also in Serbia-Montenegro, triggering intensive public debates. Many people in the region consequently realised that they had to revise their view of history and the "truth" they so far had believed. According to peace practitioners, this has created a better basis for recognizing individual and collective responsibilities.

The video was unearthed by the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Center and the human rights activist Natasa Kandic. It has become important evidence at the Hague Tribunal. This demonstrates the significant role of war crimes documentation and fact-finding in awareness-raising. It also shows that civil society can influence a shift in public discourse, together with alliance partners from the media, e.g. public broadcasting agencies.

Debates on individual and collective responsibility for the past have been primarily raised by social actors in both Bosnia and Serbia. In contrast, international mechanisms (like the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia) and official politics have had little impact on this issue. Most of these initiatives have benefited from international support (e.g. funding from the EU, the OSCE, bilateral partnerships with development agencies, transnational NGOs or charity foundations). This support has contributed to a situation that allows cross-entity and cross-border initiatives to move beyond ethnic lines, making spaces for the development of new discourses. It is clear, then, that a "civil sector" has emerged in Bosnia (Sejfija 2006). Importantly, this has created space for inter-ethnic cooperation and alternative thinking on social development that is no longer led by nationalist ideologies or religious fundamentalism.

Despite all the positive results and significant contributions from civil society actors, the somewhat ambitious expectations on the part of international organisations – that civil society would bring about change and substantially contribute to political democratisation and conflict transformation in Bosnia – have not been fulfilled. It seems that the Bosnian population is still beset with fears and inter-ethnic mistrust, which is manifest as support for radical nationalists. This was apparent during and after the national elections in autumn 2002. Following local elections in October 2004, 80% of Bosnian municipalities (99 out of 122) are now governed by representatives from one of the (Bosniak, Bosnian-Croat or Bosnian-Serb) nationalist parties.[11]

So far, peace endeavours at the grassroots level do not appear to have exerted any direct pressure, nor have they had real impact at the top political level, Track I. However, some interaction is occurring between approaches at grassroots level, Track III, and the middle level (Lederach 1997) of society, as some new political actors have emerged (e.g. multi-ethnic political parties like the

10 In 2005, the Humanitarian Law Center (Belgrade), the Dokumenta-Center for Dealing With the Past (Zagreb), the Research and Documentation Center (Sarajevo) and the Center for Peace, Nonviolence, and Human Rights (Osijek) presented a joint project for regional cooperation on the process of dealing with the past. The basic objective is to create shared documentation on crimes and serious human rights violations committed in former Yugoslavia, which is seen as an important condition for establishing stable peace in the region.
11 See Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Balkan Report 37/8, www.rferl.org/reports/balkan-report.

Liberal Party). But it has been widely documented that a major problem is that many of the groups and organisations funded and supported by the OSCE and/or international charitable institutions are still very distant from ordinary people (Chandler 2004; Lyon 2006). Such groups also are simultaneously distant from, and not generally accepted by, state institutions.

Post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina is, then, an excellent example of the ambiguous outcomes that accompany bottom-up approaches. In fact, uncoordinated and arbitrary funding of NGOs has led to a phenomenon now referred to in the region as "projectomania" (Sejfija 2006), whereby local NGOs have established a new but artificial labour market that is fully dependent on external, international funding and an on-going international presence (Grupa Autora 1998; 2003). Moreover, many of them have been caught in complex systems of application writing, reporting and evaluation, which has prevented them from acting. Some of them also have designed their aims and activities according to donor interests rather than social needs. In general, many NGOs have lost contact with society. Others have no commitment whatsoever to social change and instead merely seek to reproduce themselves. A remark from a Balkan peace activist has proven to be a realistic description for what happened in many places in post-war Bosnia: "civil initiatives respond to social needs, whereas NGOs respond to money".[12] This ties in with the RPP process and its concern to assess the negative impacts of NGOs in conflict zones, specifically as this related to the problem of diverting material and human resources.

In Bosnia, then, the international community's mistake was to assume that by promoting the NGO sector in general, a strong and powerful *civil society* would emerge which could counterbalance ethno-politics driven by state institutions and nationalist political parties. International organisations focused their funding efforts mainly on urban areas and smaller towns and neglected rural areas. Moreover, they have not given sufficient attention to community-based initiatives and their specific needs, such as women's groups and smaller youth initiatives that do not maintain offices or representative addresses. At the same time, international organisations also have largely neglected traditional key civil society actors that were deeply influenced by ethnic politics. State institutions, political parties and traditional civil society actors like labour unions, professional organisations, religious organisations and war veterans' unions remained mostly fragmented and organised along ethnopolitical lines. This became obvious yet again during the pre-election campaigns in 2006, when specific state-funded NGOs (i.e., war veterans' unions and victims' organisations) supported separatist or nationalist political campaigns.

Finally, the international community did not link its strategy of civil society development with its initiatives for institution-building and state-building. In particular, it has almost entirely disregarded the need for citizens' participation in political and social processes. In April 2006, a parliamentarian initiative to revise the Dayton Agreement constitution in order to strengthen the Bosnian state institutions vis-à-vis the institutions of the Republika Srpska and Federation failed.[13] Bosnian human rights activists have criticised mistakes made in 2005 and 2006 on the grounds that the constitutional reform project was a "closed shop": it was mainly driven by US advisors and 8 local political decision-makers, and the public was insufficiently prepared to participate.[14] The revised draft constitution still has not yet been accepted by a majority of the Bosnian parliament,

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[12] Statement of Goran Bocizevic at a Conference on "Reconciliation", organised by the Basque Peace Education Centre Gernika Gogoratuz in March 1998.
[13] The reform initiative was supported by 26 out of 42 votes, needing only two more votes for ratification. It was spoiled by members of the Bosniak Party SBiH and Croat parliamentarians who had segregated from the Croat party HDZ. For a detailed assessment of the implications of the reform debate on Bosnia's state-building process and European integration see Solioz 2006.
[14] Statement by Srdjan Dizdarevic, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Sarajevo, at the "European Perspectives of the Western Balkans" conference hosted by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, 6 July 2006, in Berlin, Germany.

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which is interpreted as a huge backlash in the state-building process. However, both international and Bosnian experts see a chance for the EU to start a new initiative. But necessary modifications to ineffective and unproductive state structures must wait even longer. The outcome of the elections on 2 October 2006 does not seem to create more favourable conditions for this project to be finished.

6.2 Lessons and Consequences

Based on experience in Bosnia, the following conclusions may be drawn.

1. Civil society groups can be "a factor in war as well as a force for peace" (Barnes 2005, 9). They can contribute to the mobilization and escalation of war. Intellectuals, research institutes and religious leaders may provide the moral justification for violence. Authorities from the educational sector and the media can shape simplistic perceptions of reality, foster stereotypes and advocate war as an answer to a complex reality. This was obvious before, during and after the wars that brought about the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, where hardliners in governments and parliaments could rely on support from civil society actors (i.e., religious leaders, universities and journalists) to fuel conflicts, promoting segregation and division. Civil society actors can also strive for democratic values, positive social change and reconciliation. But in many countries undergoing transitions from violence to peace, civil society *per se* does not necessarily contain an emancipatory potential. This is further undermined when the civil society itself must be democratised.

2. The proliferation of NGOs in post-war Bosnia, mostly in urban areas, offers no guarantee for the further development of civil society (Fischer 2006; Chandler 2004; Belloni 2001). Some would even argue that it could actually make state-building and institutional development more difficult because NGOs absorb skills and human resources that are needed in these fields (Schneckener 2003). Quality is needed instead of quantity. Much more could be done in order to better channel international aid so that it serves those stakeholder groups which want to participate proactively in regeneration and the construction of a new society. This means that cooperation partners must be selected carefully according to the contributions they can make to addressing social needs. To this end, funding schemes must be better attuned to the specific needs and dynamics of the local actors so that activities can be planned over the longer term.

3. Civil society has a certain potential, but should not be mistaken as the "good fairy" who brings about positive change to save the polity. Another important lesson from post-Dayton Bosnia is that civil society can never compensate for all of the deficits of state-building. And it cannot repair or compensate for the failures of international interventions in this respect. Expectations that civil society actors can and will bring about changes that international state-building strategies have not themselves managed to accomplish are necessarily bound to fail. The danger here is that false expectations will raise frustration levels – for example, about so-called "weaknesses" and/or the assumed lack of efficiency on the part of NGOs. But such frustrations merely seem to be a result of false expectations. They are not based on a fair assessment of the capabilities and scope of NGOs. As the experience of post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina demonstrates, replacing one unsuccessful or failed strategy ("liberalisation first") with another ("civil society building") neither leads to democratisation nor contributes to peacebuilding. *State-building and building civil society are intermeshed and parallel processes* that cannot be undertaken separately or sequentially, or indeed in confrontation with or opposition to one another.

It is highly important that international and local state actors take this into account in order to ensure that the state-building process in Bosnia finally is successful. A prerequisite for this is not repeating the mistakes that so far have been made in the constitutional reform debate. To avoid this, the EU could involve leadership in a new, more inclusive process, defining its role as a facilitator

and advisor rather than an implementing institution or governor. It is essential to involve as many different types of civil society actors as possible – labour unions and professional organisations, religious communities, media, peacebuilding and human rights organisations, women's groups, war veterans, victims' organisations and even private sector associations – in order to make sure that a new constitution will be accepted by the broader society. There is no way forward other than involving entire populations in such a process: this ensures that they own the process and can identify themselves with the polity that eventually will be created. Such practices of inclusiveness are perhaps not the fastest way to get results. But it is definitely the only way to guarantee that modifications of the constitution are not perceived as "outside-driven" and internationally-imposed projects. Alongside this, an integrated approach to peacebuilding is also needed, including institution-building, civil society support and economic development.

6.3 The Need for an Integrated Approach in War-to-Peace Transition

Reviewing international intervention strategies in the past, an "institution-building first" strategy is now being promoted in post-conflict peacebuilding and the stabilisation of failed states (Schneckener 2005). This strategy aims to: 1) strengthen and reform administration; 2) improve budget and tax systems; and 3) establish institutions of conflict regulation. Institution-building is certainly indispensable, but it is not enough. In order to create stable social and political structures in war-torn societies, two more things are needed: 1) a convincing strategy for economic development; and 2) bottom-up approaches and civil-society building activities that can provide a basis for social consensus and communicate the spirit of peace agreements.

Without *economic development*, people will feel insecure. At such times, they tend to vote for extremist parties or depend on clientelistic structures or even the goodwill and/or loyalty of warlords. To build political institutions that serve their citizens, to establish transparency and overcome corruption is indispensable for creating and maintaining credibility. It also ensures that people will participate in elections in the first place. This is particularly important: in many post-war societies, especially in Bosnia, young people are steeped in lethargy and cynicism about any kind of politics at all.

Those who argue that states have the monopoly on *peacebuilding*, and are the most efficient actors for this purpose, should ask themselves: How are you going to build state institutions and a democratic polity if new generations are not going to vote at all, if they vote in favour of nationalist or extremist parties or if they are "against" politics in general? Who will empower people to feel and act like citizens and get engaged in their community? States cannot impose this from above. This is where civil society actors active in peace education, youth initiatives, students' associations and labour unions come into play. Finally, state actors depend on civil society in order to create the *social consensus upon which political reforms can be based*.

Relationship building and establishing cultures of peace in order to overcome cultures of violence is also an important task that certainly cannot be fulfilled by state initiatives alone. Democratic polities and peaceful coexistence cannot be organised by state institutions from the top down. State institutions can only gain trust by efficiency, but democracy and its norms and values also must be learned and experienced on the ground, at the grassroots level. Without a well-functioning state, the development of civil society is almost impossible. At best, it can only form isolated pockets of civil society activity. Conversely, without a well-functioning civil society, citizens cannot viably identify with a democratic polity.

Rather than "(…)-first" strategies, an *integrated approach* is needed. As Barnes observes: "While it is rare for grassroots efforts to transform wider systems of conflict and war, it is also not

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possible for these wider systems to be transformed without stimulating changes at the community level. Therefore, many analysts and practitioners agree with John Paul Lederach's observation that there is a need to build peace from the bottom up, the top down and the middle out. Yet the methodologies for crossing the scale barrier, simultaneously and in a coordinated manner, are not well developed. Therefore the key seems to be in negotiating dynamic and strategic partnerships. … Partnerships for peace may be the antidote to systems and networks sustaining war. Yet to achieve this potential, we need to acknowledge the legitimacy of CSOs [Civil Society Organisations] in peace and security matters and to strengthen official recognition of their roles in the conflict prevention partnership. This can then be operationalised through stronger mechanisms and resources for interaction between IGOs [International Governmental Organisations], CSOs, and governments in order to institutionalise the capacity for prevention" (Barnes 2005, 22).

Sustainable peacebuilding needs state-building, economic development and organic civil society development. Ideally both state institutions and the private sector should contribute funds to civil society organisations. In Western democracies, private companies and political parties have well-established foundations that provide civil society actors with grants. In most Western countries, government ministries and departments have set up funds for NGO activities and civil society development. This is an open question: How far can linkages between local businesses and civil society initiatives go in terms of contributing to conflict transformation and peacebuilding in post-war regions or countries in transition? Not much systematic research has been done on this topic, although some expert analyses are available (Banfield, Günduz and Killick 2006; Killick et al. 2005).

In many countries in transition, political leaders in parliaments and governments still have difficulty seeing the benefit of cooperation with civil society. In post-war regions, as the Bosnian example demonstrates, politicians may co-opt NGOs for the purposes of separatist politics, or cooperate with select parts of civil society that strengthen their own power, ignoring more liberal or critical forces. Politicians in countries that are involved in wide-scale transformations must be sensitised to the reality that cooperation with civil society in general is necessary for creating political consensus. In turn, this ensures that political decisions will be accepted by society at large. It is therefore in their own interest to involve civil society in discussions about political reforms, including constitutional debates. International intervention strategies for state-building therefore should not limit themselves to setting up parliaments, governments and democratic institutions. They must also try to motivate politicians to support civil society, for example by setting up politically-neutral budget lines and/or institutionalised structures for cooperation.

A precondition for this is that members of a society understand themselves as citizens who take responsibility and become active in either their local communities or in associations that articulate needs and grievances in the public sphere. These concepts of citizenship and civil society are likely to be very difficult to implement in many zones of conflict. It is also possible to conclude that in some places these ideas are not at all relevant and any effort to impose these values would amount to social engineering. But in many cases, like the Balkans, setting up viable civil society structures simply requires patience and long-term support strategies. The civil society sector in Bosnia, for instance, may include elements that are open to criticism, but nonetheless it also has potential to develop. Already in Bosnia, civil society actors and academics have begun to discuss the question of how to increase credibility and social acceptance, as well as how to create a vibrant civil society that can contribute to social and political change instead of artificial and marginalised pockets of activism.

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Civil society cannot, however, replace the state. Civil society typically depends on the security and predictability provided by an effective democratic state controlled by a government that ensures the rule of law and creates policies that respond to the needs of the population. Thus civil society and democratic states are highly complementary, even interdependent (Barnes 2005, 9). This leads us to the general question of how civil society relates to state-building and what implications this has for theoretical conceptualisations of civil society.

7. Civil Society in Relation to State-Building: Theoretical Implications

As White (2004, 9) provocatively asserts, the term "civil society" "has been hijacked in pursuit of various developmental and political projects, each with its own preferred sector of associational life. Neo-populist development theorists and practitioners extol the virtues of grass-roots NGOs as paradigms of social participation and the potential building blocks of democracy; economic liberals bolster their case for deregulation and privatisation by emphasizing how these measures contribute to the emergence of a business class to counterbalance and discipline wayward states; treasury based cost-cutters see devolution of governmental functions to voluntary organisations as an ideologically palatable way of reducing state expenditure; conservative thinkers see it as a way of preserving traditional social solidarities in the face of the disruptions caused by markets; and radical socialists zero in on the political role of social organisations based on a community, group or issue in transforming society or providing an alternative form of social governance."

Currently, the concept of civil society is used in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes, functioning mostly as a pragmatic rather than theoretical concept. It therefore requires further conceptualisation. In particular, confusion for practitioners and researchers alike is generated by the problem that the concept of civil society is used both as a *normative concept* and an *analytical concept*.

In Western debates, civil society usually has been discussed as an important counterbalance to the power of the nation state. Historical examples of this interpretation include Locke's thesis that civil society offers protection from the potential abuses and arbitrariness of state power. Similarly, Montesquieu argued for a balance between state authority and civic associations. Likewise, deTocqueville advocated self-government and civic participation as a means for counteracting power abuses by the state and/or other social majorities, a position that Dahrendorf also later developed. (For comprehensive overviews see Merkel and Lauth 1998; White 2004; Whitehead 2004.) The concept of civil society underwent a renaissance after the breakdown of the communist regimes in the late 1990s. There are on-going discussions about the character of civil society, most notably those of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, especially Habermas. There are also other contemporary thinkers who build on this work, a few of whom are considered below.

According to Habermas (1992, 374), reaching democratic opinions and decisions in political parties, associations and parliaments demands an exchange with "informal public opinions". These can only be formed in the context of a politicised public sphere that develops independently of the power structures of the state. This idea of civil society excludes state institutions, political parties, as well as economic interest groups and the business community. The core of civil society is formed by spontaneous associations, organisations and social movements that articulate social problems and grievances to a political public. But as Merkel and Lauth (1998, 6) argue, a problem arises because such a civil society turns out to have very limited capacity for action.

In contrast to Habermas, Merkel and Lauth propose a more realistic concept of civil society, defined as a sphere of action beyond the state that consists "of a variety of plural organisations and associations which have been founded on a voluntary basis, articulate their particular material and normative interests and organise autonomously. It is located in the space between the private sphere and the state" (ibid., 7). Groups who pursue exclusively private purposes (families, firms and businesses, etc.), as well as political parties, parliaments and state administrations do not form part of civil society. According to this interpretation, aims and purposes articulated by civil society always concern the *res publica*. Civil society is a heterogeneous actor, a melting pot of different actors who share one normative common denominator based on: 1) respect and tolerance towards "the other"; 2) fairness; and 3) the exclusion of violence. This "civil consensus" is reflected on the individual level, shaping a citizen identity. At the same time, a pluralistic civil society representing a variety of interests is seen to guarantee a culture of tolerance and compromise, mitigate political conflict and contribute to political consensus. Moreover, civil society is seen as important in counterbalancing the state, controlling the activities of government and preventing abuse of power by state institutions.

However, in order to influence social change and conflict transformation, civil society must not only be seen as a counterpart opposed to the state and completely distant to political parties and parliaments. Rather, civil society organisations must cooperate with these, but at the same time keep a critical distance. It is necessary to forge linkages between political parties, state administration and NGOs (working at local, national and regional levels) and community-based initiatives, as well as with open-minded and tolerant media.

As White (2004, 11) explains, "If we choose to identify civil society as a distinct, but broadly defined, sphere of intermediate social associations, we should … clarify its relationship to the state on one side and society on the other. Although the conventional *dichotomy between the state and civil society* is important in understanding the political character of the latter – as an entity separate from and independent from the former and reflecting the voluntary association of social actors outside the state – it is an oversimplification of the relationship." Civil society remains an ideal type concept. In reality the boundaries between state and civil society are often blurred: "states may play an important role in shaping civil society as well as vice-versa; the two organisational spheres may overlap to varying degrees" (ibid.).

Moreover, when discussing the relationships between civil society and political systems, it seems to be useful to make a further distinction between civil society, political society and the state, as White (2004, 12) and Whitehead (2004, 29) suggest. Political society, in this context, refers to a range of institutions and actors which mediate and channel the relationship between civil society and the state. Crucial elements are political parties and leaders, which can act both "to strengthen and to weaken the democratic and authoritarian potential of a given configuration of civil society. For example, parties may be integrative mechanisms in that they are able to group together disparate or conflictual elements of civil society into broad and stable political coalitions; alternatively, they may act to articulate or intensify the inherent schisms of civil society. Political leaders may play similarly varying roles" (White 2004, 12).

In this framework, civil society could be viewed as but one particular form of the political relationship between state and society along the lines of the liberal notion of "political society". The advantage of such an approach is that it helps to identify and explain the emergence of those social forces that play a political role in establishing this relationship. But as White (2004, 9) further points out, this approach is selective and refers civil society exclusively to modern forms of association, or to those institutions that accept the principles of liberal democracy: "Each approach would

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select a particular group of social organisations as 'truly civil', the rest being presumably 'uncivil', 'non-civil' or 'pre-civil' because they are traditional, authoritarian or pre-capitalist. Each of these approaches carries with it the characteristic problems and limitations of the particular paradigm and each runs the risk of pressing analysis into a Manichean evaluative mould, with 'civil society' taking on distinct and usually favourable moral connotations" (ibid.).

As the term is used in a far broader sense in conventional development discourse to denote a much more complex universe, White also suggests that rather than solving the problem of clarity by adopting a restricted notion, it may make more practical sense to adapt an approach that tries to come to terms with this breadth, not define it away. He proposes that there is no teleological virtue in the notion of civil society and instead suggests an inclusive definition that recognizes actually existing civil societies as opposed to a normative model of civil society, as the former is more appropriate to the hybrid character of developing societies and can better capture the consequent diversity of their associational life (White 2004, 10, referring to Jean-Francois Bayart). This offers potential insight into a more complete picture of the social forces which obstruct as well as facilitate democratisation: "We would then need to make distinctions between different types or sectors of civil society, such as modern interest groups, traditional organisations, formal organisations or informal networks, advocacy or political pressure groups, legal and illegal organisations, and between associations which accept the political status quo and those who seek to transform it by changing the political regime (such as guerrilla movement or a reactionary religious organisation) or redefining the nation (as in former Yugoslavia)... One would be seeking the specific constellations of social forces which underpin a process of political democratisation, guided by an eclectic set of hypothesis. Depending on the context, some elements of civil society would be politically involved, some tolerant or supportive of authoritarian rule, some working towards an alternative conception of democracy radically different from the liberal version, and some 'progressive' in the sense that they favour and foster a liberal democratic polity. Thus any statement to the effect that a 'strong' civil society is more conducive to democratisation would be meaningless unless one went further to investigate the precise content of this constellation of social forces" (White 2004, 11).

The point of this article is not to determine a final outcome in this competition of ideas about civil society. Rather, it aims to make a more modest point: when talking about the potential of civil society, it is crucial to be explicit about whether the term is used either as an *analytic* or *normative* concept. Likewise is such specification essential to the context of civil society activities: are these oriented to democratisation, stabilizing fragile statehood or contributing to peacebuilding and conflict transformation? This is particularly important if the concept is being applied to underpin external intervention strategies. Those who use it in the latter connotation must be aware that using the term "civil society" as a *normative concept* in war-to-peace transitions, under certain conditions, might be highly problematic. Böge (2006, 18) has rightly asserted that we must challenge the thinking which assumes that all societies have to progress through "Western" stages of state and social development and that "weak incomplete states have to be developed into 'proper' Western-style states". With respect to the Global South, he proposes analysis of actual existing states not from the perspective of "incompleteness", not as "not yet properly" built or "already again failed", but to analyse these states in terms of "hybridity" of political order. He argues that recognizing hybridity is the starting point for "endeavours that aim to control violence, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Positive mutual accommodation of state and non-state traditional (and civil society) mechanisms and institutions is a promising way to make use of hybridity" (ibid.). This poses a serious challenge for approaches to conflict transformation and peacebuilding: the need to search for new forms of statehood and political community that transcend the conventional concepts

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of the post-Westphalian, Western state. And there is obviously a need to further develop the concept of civil society in order to protect it from Euro-centric biases.

8. Conclusion and Outlook

1. Experience in post-war regions and transformation countries (e. g. the Balkans) has shown that increasing the number of NGOs is not necessarily a guarantee of a vibrant *civil society*. At the same time, unspecific criticism and a general denial of civil society's potential contribution to peacebuilding and conflict transformation is unhelpful. An important challenge for the peacebuilding strategies of external actors is to include civil society actors from the very beginning in all phases of intervention, in phases of preparation of peace processes, in peace negotiations and post-conflict peacebuilding, and at the same time not to overload civil society organisations with exaggerated and unrealistic expectations. An inclusive approach is important for several reasons. First, it is the only way to include perspectives and needs assessments of broader society and civilians, instead of responding exclusively to the needs of armed groups and negotiating only with former or still-active warlords. Second, it is the only way to include the perspectives of women (and not only men), as the gender-related campaigns inspired by UN resolution 1325 have demonstrated. Third, inclusiveness increases the chance of reaching an agreement based on a broader political and social consensus.

2. *Support for civil society should be further developed as a key element of development and peace politics.* However, support and funding mechanisms must be critically assessed and improved. It is necessary to produce a realistic analysis and mapping of the stakeholders, potential spoilers and potential peacebuilders. International programmes and grants that intend to support the establishment of civil society must be very carefully designed. Selection of appropriate local partners is crucial as otherwise strategies might fail and/or resources might be wasted. One important task is to make sure that partners respond to social needs, that their agenda refers to positive social change and/or effective state control, or contributes to institution or relationship building. Building civil society does not only mean setting up new NGOs, but also working with existing traditional social actors. This also includes opening up spaces for citizens' participation in and through mechanisms of local self-government. A study commissioned by the World Bank (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006, 53ff.) has elaborated some policy recommendations for donors on how to improve criteria for and practice of funding. It also suggests that the concept of civil society underpinning and informing many Western donor funding strategies must be questioned as traditional groups, social movements and mass organisations are very important civil society actors in peacebuilding that need to be more considered in order to "avoid the common reflex that support of civil society equals support to NGOs" (ibid., 3).

3. Civil society cannot be "created" entirely from the outside. External support can only strengthen local capacities: if no such capacities exist, nothing can be strengthened. Further, international interventions should provide incentives for cooperation between state and non-state actors. In order to create effective partnerships for peace, and effective networks of action, transnational NGOs must comply with certain "codes of conduct" so as to avoid the destructive dynamics of "insider-outsider" relationships. International and transnational NGOs have to make sure that they do not undermine the efforts of local civil society peace initiatives which are working in the conflict situation, especially by imposing their own agendas. At the same time, in order to generate effective peacebuilding potentials, NGOs need to communicate among themselves so as to avoid doubling or dispersing of efforts.

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4. Civil society actors have certain capacities and clear limits, and this is why they should also be evaluated in terms of their readiness and capacity for self-reflection about their roles, mandates and impact. The limits of civil society involvement should be clearly acknowledged. However this does not mean reducing the significance of its contributions in the prevention of violence, peacebuilding and conflict transformation. According to the World Bank (2001), the most commonly identified weaknesses of the sector are: 1) limited financial and management expertise; 2) limited institutional capacity; 3) low levels of self-sustainability; 4) isolation/lack of inter-organisational communication and/or coordination; 5) small-scale interventions; and 6) lack of understanding of the broader social or economic context. In fact, very few civil society actors have the necessary knowledge, means and power, for example, to address the complex issues surrounding the political economy of war in any substantial way (i.e., armed forces, non-state armed groups or militias who have a stake in keeping violence going after ceasefire agreements, or sustaining war economies, which are either controlled by warlords or criminal networks). Furthermore, civil society initiatives and NGOs often do not see the entire picture. Rather, they focus on just one piece of the big puzzle. Because they do not map the conflict situation as a whole, they overlook links to the issues of legal justice, social justice and human rights. This may lead to situations whereby the dynamics of conflict and underlying power structures remain un-addressed.

5. *Peacebuilding and conflict transformation require an integrated approach* that addresses state institutions, economic structures and civil society. People from different parts of society, and from the government administration, political parties and parliaments, need to cooperate and focus on building institutions that enable effective control (i.e., of non-state actors who break the rules as well as state institutions who misuse their power) and guarantee security and justice for social groups and individuals ("rule of law"). A guiding theoretical concept for peacebuilding was, and still is, based on the assumption that local "peace constituencies" (Lederach 1997), or networks and alliances of groups and individuals dedicated to peaceful social change and to building institutions of constructive conflict management, must be strengthened. The concept of building and strengthening strategic alliances for peace is still viable for peacebuilding. But it is not useful to apply it mainly in a horizontal way and reduce it to alliances among civil society actors. The challenge is to forge alliances in a vertical way – between civil society actors on the local, regional, national and international level – and at the same time create alliances of individuals and groups within state administrations, political parties, parliaments and civil society organisations.

6. Finally, more *research* is necessary for obtaining more reliable and convincing results on the impact of peace work in general, and in particular on the activities of civil society actors. There is still not much systematic empirical knowledge on their impact and assessments often take place at a very general (sometimes politically-biased) level. A lot of knowledge has been gained by project evaluations, but there is still a lack of context studies. Moreover, different types of assessment are needed: something in between short-term evaluations and long-term academic research projects. There is a further need to identify the implicit theoretical assumptions underlying the activities of NGOs. Short-term evaluations may fulfil donors' needs, but it is also necessary to establish monitoring and assessment procedures geared toward enabling learning processes that serve the needs of local groups and individuals involved in peacebuilding projects. These procedures should be supportive and constructive, rather than controlling instruments. They should enhance self-reflection and therefore be designed as participatory endeavours. They should enable people to carry out efficient planning, to define goals, strategies and priorities and to set up realistic criteria for self-evaluation.

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Participatory approaches are core elements of *action research*,[15] which is oriented to producing comparative studies of the conditions and impacts of social action, while simultaneously working to influence social action. The research design is focused on social needs and grievances. Action research does not aim to prove theoretical assumptions in the first instance, but to change the analysed problems or grievances. Action research is seen as a social process that cannot be split into single and "objective" variables. Data inquiry instead is seen as part of the social process. In order to contribute to project development and social learning, the evaluation of peacebuilding initiatives should be guided by these principles. This cannot be done through short-term visits by evaluators. However, long-term research projects taking several years also are not suitable for supporting many projects. It is necessary to find a compromise between these two extremes.

Furthermore, apart from analysis of single projects, programmes or missions, more context studies of peacebuilding in post-war situations are crucial. This can serve as basis to increase knowledge about civil society development and institution-building in fragile states and war-torn societies, as well as help to further conceptualise both the analytic and normative concepts of civil society.

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[15] For overviews of action research see Reason 1994, Folger 1999, Newman 2000, Ross 2000, and Reason and Bradbury 2006. Also see www.aepro.org, the website of the "Action Evaluation Research Institute".

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