

# Civil Society in Conflict Transformation: Strengths and Limitations

Martina Fischer

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>288</b>
<b>2. NGO Activities at the International and Regional Level</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>3. Ambivalent Assessments of NGO Roles and Activities</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>4. Civil Society and State-Building in War-Torn Societies: The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina</b>	<b>298</b>
4.1 International Governance Based on “Liberal Peace”	298
4.2 Civic Engagement for Regeneration and Community Building	300
4.3 Rapid Growth and Fragmentation of the NGO Sector	301
4.4 Lessons from Bosnia	303
<b>5. Theoretical Implications – Clarifying Concepts and Strategies</b>	<b>305</b>
<b>6. Conclusion and Further Perspectives</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>7. References</b>	<b>308</b>

# 1. Introduction

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 can be witnessed in the field of conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict regeneration. But while civic engagement and the role of social actors within the framework of the nation state is widely accepted in both politics and academia (at least in the OECD world), there is less agreement on the significance of civil society for international politics and in conflict settings. Politicians, practitioners and scholars continue to debate the capacities, impacts and legitimacy of civil society actors. Definitions and classifications remain contested: whether in academic debates or development discourses, different terms are used to describe the topic of discussion.

International relations theory introduces the term *non-state actors* (NSAs). This definition reflects the assumptions of realist theories, which assert that interactions between states are of central concern in studying international policy. NSAs in this view 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 has also begun to be used in development cooperation, especially since the Cotonou Agreement between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, in which the participation of non-governmental actors in ACP-EU cooperation was formally recognised (European Commission 2006).

The term *non-governmental organisations* (NGOs) is also used widely in this field. NGOs are usually referred to as “non-state, non-profit orientated groups who pursue purposes of public interest”, excluding the private sector (Schmidt/Take 1997).

In recent years, the term *civil society organisations* (CSOs) has gained importance and been adopted by international organisations. The World Bank, too, now uses this term to refer to “not-for-profit organizations which have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations” (World Bank 2005, 3).

Unsurprisingly, there is no commonly-agreed definition of what civil society is. Scholars have focused on the impact of civil society on democratisation and power balances (Burnell/Calvert 2004; Whitehead 2004) and on global governance (Richmond 2005; Burbridge 1997). Amidst controversial findings, 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 [...] enjoy autonomy from the state” (White 2004, 10).

Given the diverse range of competing and overlapping terms, it is important here to specify the particular definitions being used in the discussion. In this chapter, 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.

This chapter investigates the role of civil society actors in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Some of the questions addressed are: what types of activities do international and transnational NGOs undertake in order to influence international politics in a way that contributes to coping with global challenges? What are the strengths and limitations of these actors? What is the role and potential of (local) civil society actors in war-to-peace transitions? What problems and dilemmas stem from the development of civil society in war-torn societies? How do civil society's contributions relate to state-building? By way of elaborating these questions, *section 2* gives a general overview of NGO activities at the international and regional level. *Section 3* presents assessments of their roles, impact and legitimacy. *Section 4* addresses the contributions of civil society to post-conflict peacebuilding, with specific reference to the experience in the Balkans, looking at the war-torn society of Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Section 5* investigates the theoretical implications and contextualises the development of civil society in relation to state-building. *Section 6*, finally, presents conclusions and policy recommendations and proposes topics for further research.

## 2. NGO Activities at the International and Regional Level<sup>1</sup>

Antecedents of present-day international NGOs were already emerging in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 UN anti-discrimination policies (for an overview see Richmond 2005; Alger 2005; Klein 2002; Debiel/Sticht 2005).

During the last two decades, the number of NGOs has substantially increased. The UNDP (2003, 3) recently estimated the number of NGOs active in the fields of international development, human rights, security and peace politics at 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 are supporting the International Climate Convention, working

<sup>1</sup> This overview was first prepared for the international conference "Strategies for Peace", held by the German Foundation for Peace Research, 28/29 June 2006 in Osnabrück, Germany (see Fischer 2008).

on designing adequate instruments for poverty reduction, creating better conditions for human rights and justice, and supporting the International Criminal Court.

#### Box 1

#### Reasons for the Global Surge of NGOs

There are four central explanations for the increasing number and significance of NGOs:

1. The diffusion of new information technologies and mass media, which benefits the transnational networking of non-state actors.
2. The end of the Cold War, which has accelerated tendencies toward privatisation. The big powers have largely ceased to generously support their clients in the South, leaving the task of providing for crisis regions more and more up to NGOs.
3. The world conferences of the 1990s, including e.g. the UN World Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which constituted a substantial incentive to found new NGOs or to enlarge the radius of action of existing ones.
4. A central role is played by the triumph of the “neoliberal project” in economic globalisation during the 1980s, which was accompanied by the dismantling of the welfare state, and marked by an attitude highly sceptical of the state, emphasising the principle of subsidiarity and the privatisation of services otherwise provided by the state. NGOs have been assigned new service functions, especially in the social and health sectors, for which the state had previously been responsible. However, civil society organisations have also emerged as a movement working counter to the growing – and not least: commercial – tendency towards privatisation and calling for transparency and democratic control.

Source: Debiel/Sticht 2005, 9-10.

A main cause for the expansion of activity appears to be the growing practice of international and national development agencies channelling development aid through NGOs (see World Bank 2005, 10). The state’s direct role in operational emergency and development assistance has grown smaller and smaller, with non-profit organisations increasingly conducting projects and programmes on behalf of countries from the North. Donor governments have been increasingly outsourcing the implementation of aid programmes, but this does not imply that they are leaving the political decisions up to private actors (Debiel/Sticht 2005, 10).

NGOs also have been increasingly active in conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding. For example, they are engaged in early warning activities, preventive diplomacy through third-party intervention, facilitation of dialogue workshops and mediation, negotiations, networking and initiatives for cross-cultural understanding and relationship-building.<sup>2</sup> Each of these activities is explained in turn below.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive overview see Barnes 2005; Paffenholz/Spurk 2006; Paffenholz 2010.

*Early warning activities* include analysis and development of communication strategies that raise public awareness of emerging crises. There are also joint initiatives between state and non-state actors orientated to improving early warning systems on a global level. In the late 1990s, for example, UN organisations, research institutions and NGOs (International Alert in the UK, the PIOOM Foundation in the Netherlands, the Russian Academy of Sciences and Institute of Ethnology, the US-American Council on Foreign Relations, Canadian York University and swisspeace) founded a Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER). Through its FAST programme, the 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 the 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 another 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, in particular Track 1.5 interventions), for instance International Alert (UK), the Carter Center (USA) and its International Negotiation Network, and the church-based Community of Sant' Egidio. Some have also participated in *peacemaking processes*. In the cases of Northern Ireland, Guatemala and South Africa, civil society actors effectively facilitated broader public participation in peace agreement negotiations, thus influencing the processes (Fitzduff/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 exchange, dialogue and joint projects*. For example, NGOs working at regional levels (sometimes with support from international NGOs) 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 have also 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. 2005a; van Tongeren 1998a; European Centre for Conflict Prevention 1999).

The international literature offers various taxonomies of a range of NGO functions in this context (for an overview see Ropers 2002):

- establishing alternative media, war and peace reporting;
- monitoring elections, state institutions and other activities related to democratisation;
- youth work (community-based social policy 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;
- empowering women and campaigns for women's rights;
- initiatives for demobilisation, disarmament and demilitarisation;
- protecting endangered individuals, minority groups and refugees;
- re-integrating returnees and community building;
- human rights monitoring;
- documenting war crimes, fact-finding and identifying missing people;
- dealing with trauma and psycho-social support;
- initiatives for dialogue, reconciliation and relationship-building.

Many international NGOs and foundations have created partnerships with groups and individuals in conflict-torn societies. Others tend to organise themselves in regional or world-wide networks, lobbying governments and international organisations and aiming to raise public awareness (Serbin 2005). Several examples are presented below (see *Box 2*).

## Box 2

### NGO-Networks for Peacebuilding and Disarmament

The *Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict* (GPPAC) is a network of NGOs involved in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. They held their first global conference at the 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 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. 2005b, 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 the UN headquarters. The secretariat is hosted by the ECCP, which also coordinates the European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation.

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.

The *European Peacebuilding Liaison Office* (EPLO) was set up in 1999 by several members of the European Platform. The rationale of this project is to improve the representation of conflict transformation NGOs vis-à-vis European Union institutions; and to enhance access to information for member NGOs. Involving 27 NGOs, EPLO has four permanent working groups (on Funding for Peace; Civil Interventions for Sustainable Peace; Peacebuilding, Development and Gender;

and Peacebuilding and Security). The group also maintains close cooperation with Concord, the European-level network of development NGOs.

Furthermore, NGOs have created networks and campaigns lobbying for arms export control and raising public awareness of the economic dynamics that fuel war economies. NGOs joining the region-wide platform *European Solidarity Towards Equal Participation of People*, or Eurostep, (all of which 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. The *International Diamond Campaign* has put pressure on politicians and private companies to avoid trade with diamonds that contributes to financing war, as 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 pressure from NGO networks that has resulted in EU organisations, among others, becoming more politically focused on these issues in recent years.

Cooperation with NGOs has also been actively encouraged by state actors and international organisations, especially by the UN and EU. Since the late 1990s, for example, EU parliamentarians have begun 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 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, including NGOs' vital knowledge about societies in conflict zones. This cooperation has also influenced the EU's conflict prevention and development policy: causes of conflict have been taken into consideration much more than before in documents and programmes (Debiel/Fischer 2000). Obviously cooperation between Track I and Track II actors is also growing because such collaboration advances the self-interests of each actor (Ricigliano 2003, 459).

In the light of this overview, we can conclude that NGOs have gained more and more ground in influencing international politics. Likewise, they are now more readily accepted by state agencies and international organisations as cooperation partners. However, assessments of NGO roles in international politics remain ambivalent and controversial debates on the role, impact and legitimacy of NGOs are ongoing, as the following section illustrates.

### 3. Ambivalent Assessments of NGO Roles and Activities

Many commentators regard increased levels of NGO engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding as a positive development. It is argued that NGOs 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 [...] contribute to democratisation of the UN-System” (Klein 2002, 3). Furthermore, it is said that NGO cooperation with international organisations helps highlight formerly marginalised issues and makes decision-making processes more transparent. Some scholars even consider the expanding engagement of NGOs to be a result of an emerging “global civil society” that is guided by the values of solidarity, participation and empathy, which are orientated to supporting processes of civilisation and nonviolent conflict resolution (Kössler/Melber 1993; Colás 2002; Kaldor 2003).

Both academics and practitioners identify comparative advantages that appear to better equip non-state actors for peacebuilding activities. Some of the strengths of NGOs include their political independence, flexibility of mandates, impartiality and high standards of credibility. As van Tongeren (1998b, 23) argues:

“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 that NGOs play in conflict settings. They argue that states, international organisations and companies remain the dominant political actors, and that – by cooperating with NGOs – they use their expertise and public acceptance (Brunnengräber et al. 2005) to increase the legitimacy of their own political agendas.

Still others take a far more critical stance on NGOs. There are five central criticisms (for an overview see Reimann 2005; Debiel/Sticht 2005), which can be summarised as follows:

1. NGOs are not “independent” *per se*, but in fact often state-driven;
2. the performance of NGOs has changed because of the requirements of donor markets and mass media;
3. 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;
4. some international NGOs that are driven by external state actors or non-state actors are seen as interfering with the internal affairs of sovereign states;
5. NGOs are not subject to any democratic control 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 has increased substantially.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that NGOs can function as private branches of governments that practise outsourcing of services to these organisations. In both Europe and the US, for example, approximately 50 percent 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 lose their ability to monitor and criticise state politics. At least in European democracies, for example, funding by state agencies and criticism of official state politics can happen simultaneously, 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 something apart from, and additional to, civil society, which consists of traditional social movements, associations, etc. Such tendencies are also apparent in developing countries and post-war societies. In some cases, NGOs are merely commercial service providers. Since the late 1990s, there is ongoing lively scholarly and practical debate on this issue, including extended discussion of the bifurcation of NGOs into one of two categories: movement-orientated or service-providing (Duffield 1997; Ropers 2002; Weiss 1998). The danger that NGOs respond to money rather than responding to social needs is serious, both for international and local NGOs (this will be discussed in more detail in *section 5*).

The third argument (*western dominance*) points to uneven access to finances, media and qualified staff, etc., demonstrating that “international civil society” is riddled with structures of western privilege. In particular, this creates power imbalances and differential capacities, for example, in relation to 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 establishing cultures of dominance and subordination, as well as disregarding 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, attention 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

<sup>3</sup> Public financing doubled between 1995 and 2001, increasing from US\$ 3.1 billion to US\$ 7.2 billion (Debiel/Sticht 2005, 134; based on OECD-DAC reports).

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).<sup>4</sup> 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 overstate the case. There are equally serious mitigating factors at play. It should also be recognised, 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 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 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 that engage in the fields of human rights protection and conflict transformation. For example, as Barnes (2005, 13) articulates, GPPAC members 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. Many NGOs have developed very transparent systems of reporting about finances and funding, making this information publicly available in annual reports and on homepages. Many of them have also fostered practices of transparency in relation to their internal decision-making

<sup>4</sup> The 2001 meeting was marked by clashes over the Middle East and coincided with verbal attacks on Israel, as Arab states criticised Israel for its “racist practices”. In addition, demonstrations against Israel’s politics were organised during a parallel conference of non-governmental organisations. The delegations of the US and Israel walked out due to a draft resolution which, in their perception, singled out Israel for criticism and linked Zionism to racism.

processes. 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.

Development agencies have begun a self-critical debate on how to avoid negative outcomes and unintended side-effects. Civil society actors have added to this debate, calling for conflict sensitivity in humanitarian aid and development policy. Mary B. Anderson's (1999) assertion to "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 can serve to prolong war economies, contribute to warlords' resources and/or cause distortions of local economies. In this context, it has also been criticised that often NGOs lack an understanding of the broader social or economic context in given conflict zones where they engage as outsiders. In fact, very few civil society actors have the necessary knowledge, means and power, for example, to address in any substantial way the complex issues surrounding the political economy of war (i.e. armed forces, non-state armed groups or militias who have a stake in keeping violence going after ceasefire agreements have been reached, or in sustaining war economies that are either controlled by warlords or criminal networks). This may lead to situations in which the dynamics of conflict and underlying power structures remain unaddressed.

NGOs active in peacebuilding and conflict transformation are, therefore, debating how to develop certain standards in the field of peace work for those who intervene and engage as external actors.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, some useful expertise has been developed by the "Reflecting on Peace Practice" (RPP) project, conducted by the Collaborative for Development Action (Anderson/Olson 2003). The RPP process has identified potential negative impacts of peace work<sup>6</sup> and raised awareness that these have to be avoided. The RPP discussion process also indicates a need for more effective ways of cooperating and coordinating efforts between international NGOs and local organisations. Finally, an important insight is that external interventions can only contribute to peacebuilding if they strive for strengthening local capacities and if they use a very modest approach, being aware of the limits of third-party intervention and external influence on peace processes. Nonetheless, questions remain: (1) Which local actors are to be addressed? (2) What are the potential and limitations of building civil society in war-torn societies? (3) How is this related to state-building processes? These and similar questions guide the sections that follow.

5 For an overview see Church/Shouldice 2002-03; Smith 2003; Paffenholz/Reychler 2007. See also Reina C. Neufeldt and Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church in this volume.

6 RPP identifies six categories: 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. See the CDA issue paper on "negative impacts", online at [www.cdainc.com/rpp/negative\\_impacts.php](http://www.cdainc.com/rpp/negative_impacts.php).

## 4. Civil Society and State-Building in War-Torn Societies: The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina

Since the mid 1990s, the importance of civil society initiatives in post-conflict situations is increasingly being acknowledged, especially given the failures of international intervention efforts in Somalia, Rwanda and the Balkans (Paffenholz/Spurk 2006, 2). “Strengthening civil society” has now become a key element of international engagement in societies affected by war. There is great emphasis on its contributions to democratisation processes. On the one hand, this increasing interest in civil society involvement is a very positive development. On the other hand, as it is often understood as a solution to social, economic and political problems, there is a risk that the scope of social actors is being overestimated. Based on experiences from post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina (henceforth: Bosnia), certain dilemmas and shortcomings become evident. This example demonstrates that peacebuilding is a very demanding task, in particular in ethnopolitically divided societies and in situations where different processes of transformation overlap (e.g. post-conflict regeneration and a change of the economic and political system). It cannot simply be imposed by adopting blueprints of state-building and civil society development designed according to the OECD-model.

### 4.1 International Governance Based on “Liberal Peace”

In the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia in 1995, the issue of civil society was largely ignored. Rather, international organisations followed a strategy that can be characterised as a “liberal peace” approach.<sup>7</sup> They focused on democratisation – by holding early elections and establishing a power-sharing system – and on economic liberalisation, including the fast privatisation of formerly-socialised property, so as to adapt the country to the requirements of international finance institutions (Ehrke 2003, 153). Unfortunately, nationalist hardliners on all sides have remained in power as a consequence of the (too) early elections (Paris 2004, 111; Schneckener 2003, 66). As the International High Representative was not equipped with any powers for sanctions against destructive political actions during the first few years, these hardliners were even able to increase their influence and abuse the power-sharing institutions for obstruction.

<sup>7</sup> For a fundamental critique of this approach see Paris 2004; Paris/Sisk 2009; Richmond 2005. The paradigm proposes that a process of sustainable development needs to be based on the establishment of democracy and market economy. It is assumed that states should be organised according to liberal-democratic principles since these types of states tend to be more peaceful. The paradigm has been criticised, among other things, for the fact that too rapid political transformation and economic liberalisation may contribute to further destabilising rather than alleviating the situation, especially in post-war contexts.

Democratisation thus fostered ethnonationalist structures. Furthermore, 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. In comparison with the entities, the government at state level has hardly any power. The situation is complicated further as the entities are marked by highly distinctive political and administrative structures.<sup>8</sup> 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 of important reforms – e.g. in the education and security sectors – by ethnonationalist politicians. Police missions by the UN (UN-IPTF) and EU have partly contributed to modernising local security forces, but have been unable to ensure substantial transformation towards establishing rule of law.<sup>9</sup>

Alongside this, economic liberalisation has fostered corruption in privatisation processes. Sadly, international intervention did not provide a coherent development strategy. All of this contributed to a lack of trust and confidence of citizens in democratic institutions (Fischer 2007b). Furthermore, the international intervention in Bosnia has largely ignored the persistent war economy and the close connection between economic interests and the interest in maintaining ethno-political borders and state fragmentation. In general it 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 short, the presence of international organisations has definitely contributed to avoiding Bosnia's relapse into war, but unfortunately made no progress in facilitating state integration and democratisation.

By the late 1990s, frustration over backlashes and the ongoing lack of democratisation had led international organisations to a shift in strategy. The issue of building civil society was then put on the agenda by international organisations like the EU and the OSCE, along with the donor community. In this way, the top-down approach of the Dayton Peace Agreement was supplemented with a bottom-up approach (Chandler 2004, 240; Schneckener 2003, 61). From 1998, more funding was given to projects undertaken by NGOs in the hope that the country's entrenched political structures could be broken open by initiatives taking place at the grass-roots level of society. One problem, however, is that Bosnia does not have a strong civil society tradition.<sup>10</sup> This weakness is seen as the result of a history that did not allow a civil society culture to develop (Zivanovic 2006, 23).

8 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.

9 Attempts to establish a police force with joint standards have been strongly contested between the two entities, and obstructed (see Lyon 2007).

10 During the 1980s, Bosnia's civil society was confined to student, cultural and educational associations. During the war, many humanitarian organisations were established, but the war also prompted the emergence of ethnopolitically orientated patriotic organisations, some of which operated under the auspices of religious communities (see Sejfija 2006, 11), and a small number of peace initiatives (see Belloni/Hemmer 2010, 131).

## 4.2

### Civic Engagement for Regeneration and Community Building

As a consequence of this international support, new groups and organisations have emerged, which have been active in providing humanitarian support and psycho-social care for refugees and vulnerable persons, conducting trauma work and documenting war crimes and human rights violations. Civil society initiatives have been undertaken in peace education, dialogue projects, the empowerment of women and youth. The cultural and media scene have also developed strong momentum.

In cooperation with the UNHCR, CSOs have made significant contributions to supporting the return of refugees, in attempts to reverse ethnic cleansing (Belloni/Hemmer 2010, 134). Community-based initiatives have also worked to involve youth in order to overcome passivity (Fischer/Fischer 2003; Rosandic et al. 2007; Emrich 2005). Some of them have addressed problems in the education sector, especially the issues of participation and democratisation in schools (Emrich/Rickerts 2007). Others have successfully motivated young people to take responsibility in their communities (Fischer 2007c). Some organisations have become active in cross-border peace education, striving to establish norms of tolerance and deal with prejudices and enemy images (i.e. the Centre for Nonviolent Action, the Nansen Dialogue Centres, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights and diverse CSOs engaging in inter-religious dialogue).

A few citizens' forums have also been set up with the aim of improving social cohesion and multiethnic cooperation; examples are the Association of Independent Intellectuals – Circle 99 in Sarajevo or the Citizens' Alternative Parliament in Tuzla (Sejfića 2006, II). CSOs have also focused on monitoring elections and state institutions and on campaigns against corruption.

Very recently, CSOs have focused increasing efforts on the question of how society can constructively deal with the legacies of the war. They challenge discourses of denial and official politics of memory (Centre for Nonviolent Action 2007; Fischer 2007a). Significant activity has been undertaken on fact-finding and documenting war crimes and human rights abuses. Women's organisations have been very successful in breaking taboos and achieving compensation for women who were raped during the war. Public debates on individual and collective responsibility for war crimes and past violence have also been initiated, mainly by civil society actors. In 2005, several NGOs from Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia elaborated a joint strategy for dealing with the past<sup>11</sup> and since 2007, some of them have become the driving force behind a campaign to set up a *Regional Commission for Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling about War Crimes* (RECOM), which is now supported by over 130 non-governmental organisations and 700 individuals from all successor states of the former Yugoslavia.

Most of these initiatives have received funding from the EU, OSCE, UN, state-related development agencies, transnational NGOs or private charity foundations. Thus international support has helped to create a space for interethnic cooperation and alternative thinking on social development that is not led by nationalist discourses or religious fundamentalism. It has

11 In 2005, the Research and Documentation Center (Sarajevo), together with the Humanitarian Law Center (Belgrade), and the Dokumenta-Centre (Zagreb) set up a regional cooperation on these issues. The basic objective is to create shared documentation on crimes and serious human rights violations committed in the former Yugoslavia, which is seen as an important condition for stable peace.

also helped to conduct advocacy work for people affected by the war. Moreover, it has contributed to the establishment of cross-entity and cross-border initiatives for truth-finding and relationship-building. However, although civil society peacebuilding has gained significance for international organisations (Belloni 2001; Fagan 2005), CSO initiatives explicitly dedicated to these tasks are still rare in Bosnia-Herzegovina. And it has to be mentioned that strategies for strengthening civil society, in total, have generated very ambivalent impacts.

### 4.3

#### Rapid Growth and Fragmentation of the NGO Sector

As a result of international support, literally hundreds of civil society initiatives and NGOs have emerged, with around 8,000 civil society organisations registered in Bosnia. At the beginning of this decade, they employed an estimated 17,000 people in 2,365 offices and recorded an annual revenue of 552.7 million convertible marks (282 million euros) – approximately 4.4 percent of the GDP (Sejfića 2006, II). But uncoordinated and arbitrary funding also led to a phenomenon that has been referred to as “projectomania” (Sejfića 2007). Many organisations have been caught up in complex systems of application writing, reporting and evaluation, which has prevented them from taking (more) action. Some of them have also designed their aims and activities according to donor interests rather than social needs. Others have no commitment to social change and, instead, merely seek to ensure their own survival. Thus local NGOs have established a new, but artificial labour market that is fully dependent on external, international funding and an ongoing international presence (Grupa Autora 1998, 2003; Stubbs 2007, 220).

International actors’ mistake, here, was to assume that by promoting the NGO sector in general, a strong and powerful *civil society* would emerge and counterbalance ethnopolitics driven by state institutions and nationalist political parties. But funding efforts have focused mainly on urban areas and smaller towns and have 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 representative offices.

In general, the exponential increase in NGOs has not resulted in greater cohesion among Bosnian society. Rather, civil society has developed in two opposing directions. On the one hand, organisations with a multiethnic profile have developed, whose aim is to seek political and social alternatives. On the other hand, numerous (monoethnic) organisations with ethnopolitical or religious affiliations still exist, which are not working to overcome divisions within society. They include some war veterans’ associations, refugee organisations and victims’ groups, labour unions, student organisations and various religious communities (Sejfića 2006, V). Some organisations also maintain direct links with nationalist parties, whose campaigns in the 2006 elections were in some cases actively supported by party-affiliated NGOs.<sup>12</sup> International organisations have largely underestimated the influence of such traditional civil society actors.

12 In the RS, the Serbian Movement of Independent Associations (SPONA), composed of war veterans and eleven nationalist NGOs, has been very active in opposing reforms and supported the idea to call a referendum on the RS’s secession from Bosnia; in the Federation, some charitable organisations are eager to promote Wahhabism (see Belloni/Hemmer 2010, 145).

Furthermore, international organisations have also largely ignored traditional bodies and community-based organisations such as the *mesna/mjesna zajednica* (MZ), municipal units and neighbourhood associations that stem from Yugoslav times. They have been serving as contact points between citizens and the government, “with the power to raise revenue, commission local infrastructure projects, and issue permits and other government documents. MZ presidents would also be involved in resolving local disputes” (Belloni/Hemmer 2010, 135). There are indicators that MZs were deeply rooted in Bosnian society and widely recognised as participatory mechanisms. During and after the war, they supported activities for those in need, but later, many of them disappeared, as they were largely ignored or poorly funded by municipal governments. Only a few MZs continued to function as voluntary community organisations. Some reorganised as NGOs and applied for funding from international donors. But the majority of surviving MZs apparently remain dependent on municipal governments, and thus are likely to be controlled by political parties. Interestingly, however, “Bosnian citizens still contribute to the work of MZ boards and are more likely to volunteer and provide funds to MZs than other organizations” (ibid., 135). As Susan Woodward observes, after the war, “Bosnian villagers chose to rebuild first of all the community centre from the socialist period, against donor protest, as a means of restoring a sense of social stability after the war. Citizens also informally revived their neighbourhood associations, abolished by the international peace agreement, because, as anthropologists discovered in research on social capital after the war [...], these forms of cooperation were the most effective and legitimate means of reconciliation, not the artificial and ethnicizing policies of donors who funded “multiethnic” projects [...] and refused aid to those which were not” (Woodward 2009, 53; see also her chapter in this volume).

Obviously, international intervention policy was not based on an appropriate assessment of the former Yugoslav system and society, which differed significantly from other (centralist) socialist systems, as it used to provide some space for self-management and was marked by “a faith in a ‘patchwork’ of formal and informal care, including family care, charitable assistance, moonlighting by professionals, and networking through ‘connections’” (Stubbs 2001, 98). It is not surprising, then, that international efforts promoting civil society also did not properly take into account the complexity of civil society emerging from the war.

Despite 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 – have not been fulfilled. Rather it has become clear that the Bosnian population is still beset with fears and interethnic mistrust, which manifests as support for radical nationalists. In almost all the local and national parliamentary elections held since 1995, the majority of people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina voted for candidates with an ethnopolitical agenda.

Before the parliamentary elections in 2006, democratic citizens’ forums were formed. The citizens’ platform *Gradansko Organizovanje za Demokratiju* (GROZD) mainly targeted political corruption and the parlous state of the economy. In addition, a multiethnic youth movement, which called itself *Dosta!* (“Enough!”) became active. In the 2010 pre-election campaigns citizens’ movements showed less presence. In order to grow into a sustainable force,



they would need to develop convincing alternative political concepts besides voicing often justified criticism. A major problem is that many civil initiatives are still very distant from ordinary people and are regarded with distrust (Chandler 2004; Lyon 2007; see also Nenad Vukosavljevic in this volume).<sup>13</sup>

So far, endeavours at the grass-roots level do not appear to have exerted any direct pressure, nor have they had real impact at the top political level. In the past four years, the political discourse in Bosnia has been dominated by overt nationalist rhetoric. Influential Bosnian Serb politicians have begun calling for RS citizens to have the opportunity to vote in a referendum on whether to remain part of Bosnia. Influential Bosniak politicians, who called for the abolition of the entity structure, have further polarised the situation. Croat hardliners have also been attempting to assert their own claims to establish an additional third entity. Tensions have increased since 2007, and in particular during the election campaigns in 2010. At the same time, nationalist hardliners are challenging the High Representative more and more overtly.

A major threat today lies in the country's political stagnation and growing isolation. The state-building process is still unfinished, and some of the points contained in the Dayton Agreement require further clarification.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the structures created under the Dayton Agreement are, by and large, incompatible with closer EU-integration. International efforts to work with the conflict parties to resolve the contentious issues arising from Dayton, with a view to bringing Bosnia's constitution in line with the EU's Copenhagen criteria, have achieved little so far. Constitutional reform projects to strengthen the Bosnian state institutions vis-à-vis the institutions of the Republika Srpska and Federation have been designed as a "closed shop", largely driven by US advisors and a few local political decision-makers.<sup>15</sup> The public was insufficiently prepared and citizens' participation not envisaged.

#### 4.4 Lessons from Bosnia

Post-war Bosnia has become a pilot project for international governance guided by the "liberal peace" approach. Many scholars have since come to agree that the decision to hold early elections, before viable institutions could be built, was counterproductive. The international actors involved – in particular the EU and US – failed to pursue a clear strategy to deal with the country's problems and fell victim to a serious misunderstanding, as they mistook an agreement (the Dayton Accords) for a peace process. In fact, no such process has been initiated: 15 years after the end of the war, Bosnia is still far from achieving political integration. For political leaders and significant parts of the population there is still a lack of identification with the nation state "Bosnia-Herzegovina".

<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that according to opinion surveys, "the overall picture is that civil society, in the distrustful culture of Bosnia, is at least less distrusted than political society" (Belloni/Hemmer 2010, 139).

<sup>14</sup> These include issues concerning the status and administration of the Brcko district, the question of how to deal with state-owned properties, companies and facilities, aspects of budgetary policy, and the rule of law (see International Crisis Group 2009).

<sup>15</sup> 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 in Berlin, Germany, 6 July 2006.

Finally, the international intervention lacked a comprehensive understanding of the ambiguity of civil society in ethnopolitical conflict and it also raised unrealistic expectations with respect to the ability of grass-roots activists to bring about the political change.

One important lesson from the Bosnian case is that civil society should never be mistaken as the “good fairy” to save a polity. Civil society has important potential, but it cannot repair or compensate for the failures of (international) state-building endeavours. It cannot develop attractive visions for a unified polity if such a concept is continually boycotted by key political actors in governments and parliaments.

This is not to say that no further support should be provided for civil society approaches in Bosnia, or that no meaningful contributions to peace politics can be made at this level. On the contrary, such approaches are urgently required, especially in deeply divided societies, as they are the only ones able to create a space in which people can meet and engage outside of ethnonationalist discourses. Often, this is all that can be achieved in times of political tension. But it would be inappropriate to expect civil society actors to bring about broader political change and have an impact beyond this role. Excessively high expectations put people who are active at the grass-roots level under extreme pressure, and may ultimately cause them to break under the strain.

In Bosnia, in fact, international actors have failed to link civil society development with incentives for institutional and political reforms. Initiatives for constitutional reforms need 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 – to make sure that changes will be broadly debated and finally backed by the wider society. State-building and building of civil society have to be understood as intermeshed and parallel processes. They cannot be undertaken separately or sequentially, or indeed in confrontation with or opposition to one another. Without a well-functioning state, the development of civil society is almost impossible. Conversely, without a well-functioning civil society, citizens cannot viably identify with a democratic polity. Civil society and democratic states are highly complementary, even interdependent (Barnes 2005, 9). Thus an integrated approach is needed, one that addresses both development of institutions and society development in a way that is appropriate to the respective context, culture and tradition. This has implications for theoretical conceptualisations of civil society.

## 5. Theoretical Implications – Clarifying Concepts and Strategies

Theoretical conceptualisations largely suggest that civil society and democratic states are complementary and interdependent (for an overview of the debate see White 2004, 9). In western debates, civil society has been discussed as an important counterweight to the power of the nation state (see Merkel/Lauth 1998; Whitehead 2004). The term civil society is largely used with a normative connotation. Notably the Frankfurt School of critical theory has emphasised the emancipatory character of civil society. 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. Civil society has also been defined as a sphere of action in the space between the private sphere and the state and a melting pot of different actors who share one normative common denominator: respect and tolerance towards “the other”, fairness, and the exclusion of violence. This “civil consensus” is reflected on the individual level, shaping a citizen identity. A pluralistic civil society representing a variety of interests is considered to guarantee a culture of tolerance and compromise, mitigate political conflict and contribute to political consensus (Merkel/Lauth 1998, 6-7).

However, 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 and vice versa, and the two organisational spheres may overlap to varying degrees. It is, therefore, useful to make a further distinction between civil society, political society and the state, as Gordon White (2004, 12) and Laurence Whitehead (2004, 29) suggest. Political society, in this context, refers to a range of institutions and actors who mediate and channel the relationship between civil society and the state. Crucial elements are political parties and leaders, who can act both to strengthen and to weaken the democratic and authoritarian potential of a given configuration of civil society. In this framework, civil society is often viewed as one particular form of the political relationship between state and society, along the lines of the liberal notion of “political society”. But this approach is selective and refers exclusively to associations “that accept the principles of liberal democracy as ‘truly civil’, the rest being presumably ‘uncivil’, ‘non-civil’ or ‘pre-civil’ because they are traditional, authoritarian or pre-capitalist” (White 2004, 9).

According to liberal-democratic thinking, a precondition for building a “strong” or “vibrant” civil society is that members of a society see themselves as citizens (of a given polity) who take responsibility and become active in either their local communities or in associations that articulate needs and grievances in the public sphere. These attitudes of citizenship are likely to be very difficult to implement in many zones of conflict. It is also possible to conclude that in some places (i.e. war-torn societies in the global South) these ideas are not at all relevant and any effort to impose these values would amount to social engineering. It has been argued

convincingly that we should challenge the thinking which assumes that all societies have to progress through “western” stages of state and social development [see Volker Boege in this volume]. Analysis should therefore also consider the “hybridity” of political order. It is suggested that positive mutual accommodation of state and non-state traditional (and civil society) mechanisms and institutions is a promising way to make use of hybridity. 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 of the post-Westphalian, western state (Boege et al. 2009). There is obviously a need to further develop the concept of civil society in order to protect it from Euro-centric biases.

A study commissioned by the World Bank has outlined the shortcomings of the civil society concept underpinning many donor strategies and argued that traditional groups, social movements and mass organisations are very important actors in peacebuilding that need to be taken into account in order to “avoid the common reflex that support of civil society equals support to NGOs” (Paffenholz/Spurk 2006, 3). Following these suggestions, the World Bank has revised and further developed its approach towards civil society actors. It states that today “there is general acceptance that the Bank must, and has begun to, reach out more broadly to CSOs, including not just NGOs but also trade unions, community-based organizations, social movements, faith-based institutions, disabled persons’ organizations, charitable organizations, media, research centers, foundations, student organizations, professional associations and many others” (World Bank 2005, 3-4).

As the term civil society is used in a far broader sense in conventional development discourse, it may be wise to adopt an approach that tries to come to terms with this breadth, rather than defining it away. White, for example, proposes an inclusive definition that recognises 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 might offer insight into a more complete picture of the social forces that obstruct as well as facilitate democratisation. It is then necessary:

“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 a guerrilla movement or a reactionary religious organization) 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 hypotheses. 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, 10).

More research is necessary to obtain more reliable and convincing results on the interaction of different actors and levels. Research should aim at elaborating comparative studies of the conditions and impacts of social action, while simultaneously enhancing self-reflection of

practice. This can serve as a basis for further developing the concept of civil society. As this concept is used in many different ways for a variety of purposes, further conceptualisation is required. It is crucial to be explicit about whether the term is used either as an *analytical* or a *normative* concept. Those who use it in the normative connotation must be aware that, under certain conditions, this might be highly inappropriate.

## 6.

# Conclusion and Further Perspectives

Civil society actors have important potential for peacebuilding on the international, regional and local level. Support for civil society should be further developed as a key element of development and peace politics, in particular in post-war regeneration and peacebuilding. An important challenge is to include civil society actors from the very beginning in all phases of war-to-peace transition – from peace negotiations and implementation of agreements to post-conflict peacebuilding. Inclusion is important for several reasons. First, it is the only way to integrate perspectives 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, as the gender-related campaigns inspired by UN Resolution 1325 have demonstrated. Third, inclusiveness also increases the chance of reaching a broader political and social consensus that is necessary to make peace agreements sustainable.

In general, civil society has strong potential to promote citizens' identification with the polity. It can create social consensus as a basis for political reforms, as democracy, with all its values and norms, must be learned at the grass-roots level of society. The same applies to peaceful conflict resolution. Civil society organisations are indispensable for peacebuilding and in particular for processes of reconciliation between hostile communities. In the field of dealing with the past they are often the first ones to give important impulses that influence the discourse on issues of truth and justice. On the other hand, as the Bosnian case has shown, civil society initiatives come to their limits in situations where the political status is contested or where institutions of a polity are not accepted as legitimate by significant parts of the population.

It is important to recognise that, ultimately, civil society initiatives in fragmented societies can only influence political change to a limited extent. Therefore, donor agencies and international partners should not overload civil society in war-torn societies with exaggerated expectations. Civil society actors have certain capacities and clear limits that should be clearly acknowledged. At the same time, unspecific criticism and a general denial of civil society's potential contribution to peacebuilding and conflict transformation is also unhelpful.

In order to generate effective peacebuilding potential, NGOs need to communicate among themselves so as to avoid doubling or dispersing of efforts. But they also need to search for alliance partners in parliaments, governments and administrations. The challenge is to forge peace alliances “horizontally” between civil society actors on the local, regional, national and

international level – and at the same time create vertical alliances of individuals and groups on different levels of society. As John Paul Lederach (1997) has outlined, there is a need to build peace from the bottom up, the top down and the middle out. Yet the methodologies for crossing and linking activities between different levels are not very well developed.

Last but not least, self-reflection of roles and activities remains an important challenge for civil society actors who decide to intervene as outsiders. They should reflect whether their activities are embedded in questionable post-war reconstruction endeavours designed according to “liberal peace” blueprints, or even contribute to legitimate the use of force for the end of reproducing the liberal order (Richmond 2005, 32). Experience in several cases of intervention has shown that building state institutions and developing society in post-war societies cannot simply follow models of western democracies but has to reflect the respective cultural context and historic experience.

Consequently, external support for local civil society actors must be improved. 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 that want to participate proactively in the regeneration and 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. Selection of appropriate local partners is also crucial to avoid the possible misuse and waste of resources. Building civil society does not necessarily mean setting up new NGOs, but also working with existing traditional social actors (Paffenholz/Spurk 2006, 53ff.) and opening up spaces for citizens’ participation in and through mechanisms of local self-management. At the same time, international actors 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. In any case and by all means, international actors (IGOs as well as governments and INGOs) should be aware that civil society cannot be “created” entirely from the outside. External support can only strengthen but not entirely create local capacities.

## 7.

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