



The Aspen Institute  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2007**  
**2008**

Germany



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Dear Friend of the Aspen Institute

In the following pages you will find a report on the Aspen Institute Germany's activities for the years 2007 and 2008. As you may know, the Aspen Institute Germany is a non-partisan, privately supported organization dedicated to values-based leadership in addressing the toughest policy challenges of the day. As you will see from the reports on the Aspen European Strategy Forum, Iran, Syria, Lebanon and the Balkans that follow, a significant part of Aspen's current work is devoted to promoting dialogue between key stakeholders on the most important strategic issues and to building lasting ties and constructive exchanges between leaders in North America, Europe and the Near East.

The reports on the various events that Aspen convened in 2007 and 2008 show how Aspen achieves this: by bringing together interdisciplinary groups of decision makers and experts from business, academia, politics and the arts that might otherwise not meet. These groups are convened in small-scale conferences, seminars and discussion groups to consider complex issues in depth, in the spirit of neutrality and open mindedness needed for a genuine search for common ground and viable solutions. The Aspen Institute organizes a program on leadership development. In the course of 2007 and 2008, this program brought leaders from Germany, Lebanon, the Balkans and the United States of America together to explore the importance of values-based leadership together with one another. Aspen also organizes a significant annual program of public events for members of the Friends of the Aspen Institute and select, invited guests. The twenty events that were convened in 2008 are also described in brief.

As we move into the New Year, we look forward to continuing and to building upon this ongoing program of activities – particularly in the areas of leadership development and of larger scale public programs. We hope that we may count upon your financial support in these efforts. Information on ways in which you can help The Aspen Institute Germany is given on page 22 below. In closing, we would like to thank Aspen's donors, cooperation partners, participants, moderators and board members for their support in making the program that was successfully convened in 2007 and 2008 possible. We look forward to welcoming you at an Aspen Institute event soon.

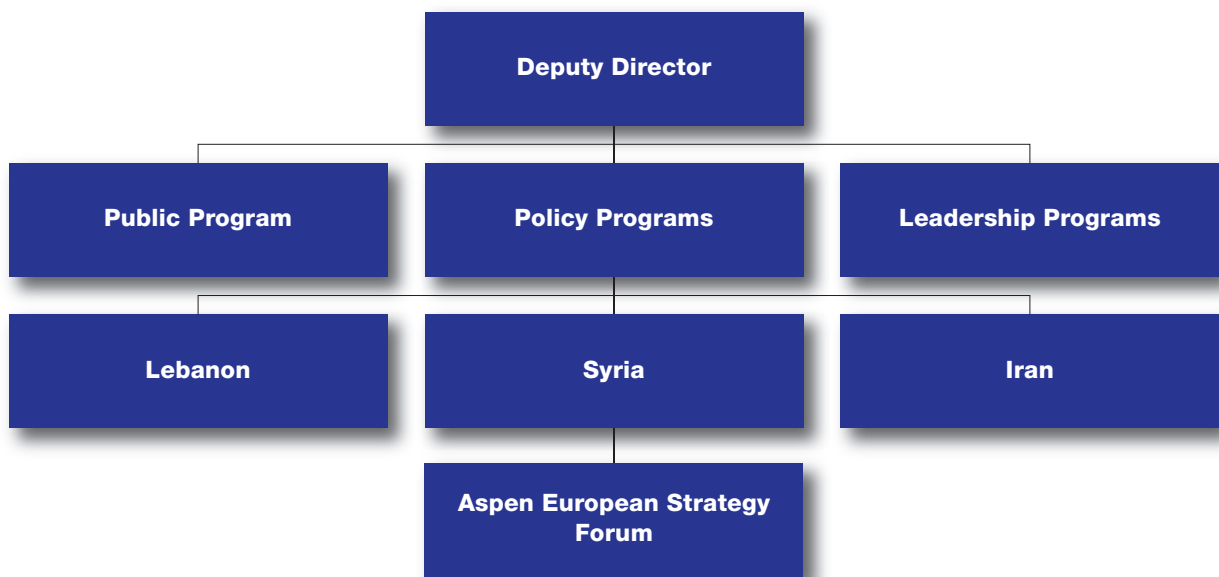
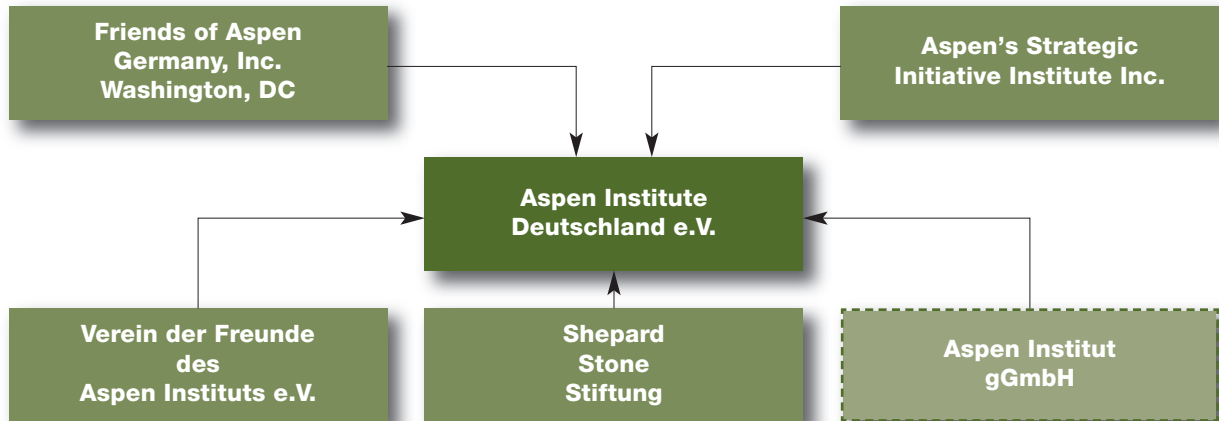
Best regards,



Charles King Mallory, IV  
Executive Director,  
The Aspen Institute Germany.

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Digital Media and Journalism in Iran, Berlin	December 12-14, 2007
Women's Movements in Islam, Berlin	January 29-31, 2008
Digital Media and Journalism in Iran, Berlin	April 23-25, 2008
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Digital Media and Journalism in Iran, Berlin	November 25-27, 2008
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A New Transatlantic Dialogue I, Berlin	May 18-20, 2008
A New Transatlantic Dialogue II, Istanbul	October 16-19, 2008
A New Transatlantic Dialogue III, Berlin	December 05-07, 2008

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“The Middle East: Developments and Challenges”	January 16, 2008
Director General Aharon Abramovitch, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel	
“Iran’s Nuclear Program: Necessary Steps to Build Confidence”	January 26, 2008
Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, Vienna	
“World Power India - The New Challenge for the West”	February 14, 2008
Dr. Olaf Ihlau, Journalist, Former Foreign Editor of “Der Spiegel”	
“Egypt’s Role in the Broader Middle East”	March 11, 2008
H.E. Mohamed Al-Orabi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Federal Republic of Germany	
“The U.S. Market and U.S. Capital Market Regulations”	March 12, 2008
Paul S. Atkins, Commissioner, U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission	
“The Transatlantic Partnership and the Future of German-American Relations”	May 15, 2008
Bundesminister Dr. Thomas de Maizière, Head of the Federal Chancellery	
“Green Growth”	June 19, 2008
Reinhard Bütikofer, Federal Chairman, Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen	
“Liberty’s Best Hope”	July 03, 2008
Kim R. Holmes, Vice President of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, The Heritage Foundation	
“Taking the Temperature of the Transatlantic Relationship”	August 19, 2008
Dana Rohrbacher, Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives	
“Islamic Movements in the Arab World – Future Partners or Enemies?”	September 09, 2008
Dr. Amr Hamzawy, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	
“No Bread for the World? Causes and Effects of the Latest Global Famine”	September 11, 2008
Iraq – Retrospective and Perspective”	September 21, 22, 2008
Lieutenant General (Ret.) Ricardo S. Sanchez, Commander, Coalition Joint Task Force 7, Iraq, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Berlin	
“After the Irish ‘NO’ Vote: What Next for the European Unification Process?”	September 30, 2008
Ambassador Dr. Dietrich von Kyaw, Former Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Union	
“Germany: Ways Out of the Crisis?”	October 23, 2008
Dr. Fritz Oesterle, CEO, Celesio AG	
Gala Dinner Schloß Charlottenburg	October 27, 2008
“Taking Stock of U.S. Democracy Promotion in the Middle East. Seven Years Later: Back to Realism?”	November 19, 2008
J. Scott Carpenter, Washington Institute for Near East Policy	
“The Economic Outlook After the Financial Crisis”	December 03, 2008
Prof. Dr. Dr. Hans-Werner Sinn, President, Ifo Institute for Economic Research	
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# INTRODUCTION

The Aspen Institute is an international nonprofit organization that fosters enlightened leadership, the appreciation of timeless ideas and values, and open-minded dialogue on contemporary issues. Founded in 1950, the institute and its international partners seek to promote the pursuit of common ground and deeper understanding in a non-partisan and non-ideological setting through seminars, policy programs, conferences and leadership development initiatives. The institute is headquartered in Washington DC, and has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and at the shores of the Chesapeake Bay on Maryland's Wye River. Its international network includes partner Aspen Institutes in Berlin, Rome, Lyon, Tokyo, New Delhi and Bucharest as well as leadership initiatives in Africa, Central America, and the Middle East.

[aspeninstitute.org](http://aspeninstitute.org)

The Aspen Institute Germany was founded in 1974 as the first institute outside of the USA. Under the leadership of Shepard Stone, Aspen Germany established a unique track record in building German-U.S. cooperation and dialogue with the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. Aspen Germany convenes non-partisan, substantive dialogues on the toughest international policy issues. Like its U.S. affiliate, Aspen Germany organizes leadership programs, policy programs and a public program of events; it is headquartered in Berlin and an increasing portion of its programming is carried out in industrially important states such as Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria.

[aspeninstitute.de](http://aspeninstitute.de)

The Aspen Institute Germany is a not-for-profit organization, donations to which are tax-deductible in both Germany and the United States of America. Aspen receives income from five principal sources: two in the United States of America, and three in the Federal Republic of Germany, including one German vehicle that is in formation, as shown opposite.

The Friends of the Aspen Institute Germany, Inc. is a new vehicle. Through it the institute will solicit support from the 5,700-plus U.S. individuals who have passed through Aspen Germany over the years. It is being registered as a public charity under article 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code – it does not currently generate any support revenues.

Aspen's Strategic Initiative Institute, Inc. is a U.S. 501 (c) (3) corporation that is used as a channel by which U.S. institutions can provide support to Aspen. Donations of this type typically are one-time gifts that may span one or two years, but are not inherently recurring in nature. In 2007, ASII provided \$680,000 in support to Aspen.

The Friends of the Aspen Institute is an independent association under German law, with its own statutes, board of trustees and executive management board. Its purpose is "to support the Aspen Institute Berlin e. V. and its activities ... by providing the combined income of [the association] to the Aspen Institute". After expenses, the association generates approximately € 88,000 annually in support for Aspen; these funds are available to support Aspen's activities without any restrictions.

The Shepard Stone Foundation was created in 1987 to commemorate the 80th birthday of Professor Shepard Stone (1907-1990) – Aspen's founding director. The foundation's purpose is to support Aspen (a) by funding Aspen projects and/or Aspen's international academic conference program; and (b) by providing up to 50% of the foundation's annual income to Aspen for general expenses. The foundation's purpose may only be changed upon the liquidation or possible loss of charitable status of the beneficiary, and it may only be abolished with the agreement of the beneficiary. In 2008, the foundation provided € 135,000 in support to the Aspen Institute.

Aspen Institut gGmbH is a new legal vehicle in formation. It is being set up for the purpose of investment management and the provision of humanitarian assistance. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Aspen Institute Deutschland e.V., which is its sole shareholder.

Aspen's small staff organizes three different types of activities: a public program of events open to the Friends of the Aspen Institute and to select invited guests; a closed, invitation-only series of policy programs, undertaken at the instigation of various sponsors; and leadership programs as shown in the figure opposite.

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**Volker Berghahn** | Prof. Volker Berghahn is the Seth Low Professor of History at Columbia University. He studied at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he received his MA before moving to the University of London to do his PhD. After two years as a postdoctoral fellow at St. Antony's College, Oxford, he completed his Habilitation and received his *venia legendi* from the University of Mannheim. From 1969 he taught at the University of East Anglia in England and at Warwick University before accepting a professorship at Brown University in 1989 and his current position at Columbia in 1998. He has published more than a dozen books on modern German history and European-American business relations after 1945. His "America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe" appeared in 2001. It deals with the work of Shepard Stone in early postwar Germany and at the Ford Foundation in the 1950s and 1960s. Stone later became the first director of the Aspen Institute Germany.

From 1969 he taught at the University of East Anglia in England and at Warwick University before accepting a professorship at Brown University in 1989 and his current position at Columbia in 1998. He has published more than a dozen books on modern German history and European-American business relations after 1945. His "America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe" appeared in 2001. It deals with the work of Shepard Stone in early postwar Germany and at the Ford Foundation in the 1950s and 1960s. Stone later became the first director of the Aspen Institute Germany.



**Hildegard Boucsein** | Dr. Hildegard Boucsein works as a political consultant in Berlin with a background in different political, executive and legislative positions. She has worked as senior consultant in federal and regional election campaigns for the CDU and CSU since the 1980s and held different executive

positions including Permanent Undersecretary for Federal and European Affairs with the Berlin Senate. In that office she coordinated Berlin's external relations with the European Commission in Brussels and the German Federal Government from 1991 to 2001. She also has a broad background in transatlantic and European-American activities. She serves as a consultant to the EU Center of Excellence at Texas A&M. She is member of the Executive Board of the Shepard Stone Foundation, Berlin. Boucsein graduated from Düsseldorf University in 1983 (Education and American Studies) with a doctorate in Philosophy. She also studied at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas and worked as a Visiting Scholar in 10/2000 and 10/2001 at the International Center/George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas. Following her academic education she became head of the Personal Office of the Mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen (1984-1989). At the time the Berlin Wall came down, she joined the Aspen Institute as deputy director (1989-1991).



**Reinhard Bütikofer** | Reinhard Bütikofer was president of Alliance 90/The Greens from 2002 to 2008. Before that, he had been the party's National Executive Director since December 1998. As one of the leading national politicians within the Green Party, Mr. Bütikofer looks back on a long

career within the Green movement, including about 20 years of experience in public life. Mr. Bütikofer became a member of the Greens in 1984 and was also elected to the city council of Heidelberg. In 1988, he was elected to the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg and became the Green parliamentary group's speaker on budget issues and European affairs. In the course of 10 years he contributed to his party's platform and became a key point campaigner in different national and state elections. In 1997, he was elected chairman of the state-level party organization of Baden Württemberg. In 1998, Alliance 90/The Greens formed a coalition government with Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD), holding three government ministries including the ministry of foreign affairs.



**Gerhard Cromme** | Dr. Gerhard Cromme, born 1943, studied law and economics at the universities of Münster, Lausanne, Paris and Harvard (PMD), where he gained a doctorate. From 1971 to 1986 Dr. Cromme worked for the Compagnie de Saint Gobain group, ultimately as Deputy Delegate General for

the Federal Republic of Germany. At the same time he was also Chairman of the Board of Management of VEGLA/Vereinigte Glaswerke GmbH in Aachen. In 1986 he joined the Krupp Group, where he was Executive Board Chairman of the group holding company from 1989. In 1999 Krupp and Thyssen merged to form ThyssenKrupp. Dr. Cromme was Executive Board chairman of the company until 2001. In October 2001 he became Chairman of the Supervisory Board of ThyssenKrupp AG. Since April 2007 Dr. Cromme has been Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Siemens AG. He is also a member of the supervisory boards of Allianz SE, Axel Springer AG and Compagnie de Saint-Gobain. In addition, he is a member of the European Round Table of Industrialists, which he chaired from 2001-2005. From 2003-2007 Dr. Cromme was Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the European School of Management and Technology (ESMT) in Berlin. From 2001 to June 2008 he was Chairman of the Government Commission on the German Corporate Governance Code.



**Mathias Döpfner** | Dr. Mathias Döpfner, born 1963, studied musicology, German and theatrical arts in Frankfurt and Boston. He started his career as a journalist at the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” in 1982. He was director of a PR agency from 1988 to 1990. In 1992 he worked for the Gruner + Jahr publishing company in Paris and later became assistant to the company’s CEO. He then held further positions in journalism as editor-in-chief of “Wochenpost” in Berlin (1994–1996) and “Hamburger Morgenpost” (1996–1998). He has been with Axel Springer AG since 1998, initially as editor-in-chief of Die Welt. Dr. Döpfner became the member of the management board responsible for the multimedia division in July 2000 and took charge of the newspapers division as well in October 2000. He has been CEO of Axel Springer AG since January 2002. Dr. Döpfner has become a member of the board of TimeWarner Inc., New York.



**Leonhard H. Fischer** | Leonhard H. Fischer has been Co-Chief Executive Officer of RHJ International since May 2007 and a member of the board of directors since September 18, 2007. Prior to joining RHJI, Mr. Fischer was Chief Executive Officer of Winterthur Group, an insurance subsidiary of Credit Suisse, from 2003 to 2006, and a member of the executive board of Credit Suisse Group from 2003 to 2007. Mr. Fischer joined Credit Suisse Group from Allianz, where he had been a member of the management board and head of the corporates and markets division since 2001. Previously, he had been with Dresdner Bank AG as a member of the executive Board since 1998 and with JP Morgan in Frankfurt since 1987. Mr. Fischer holds an M.A. in Finance from the University of Georgia.



**Jeffrey Gedmin** | Dr. Gedmin has served as President and CEO of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty since March 2007. From 2001 to 2006 he served as director of the Aspen Institute Germany. Before that, he was a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and executive director of the New Atlantic Initiative.

Dr. Gedmin has been a frequent contributor to leading U.S. and European newspapers and magazines and is author and editor of several books on European issues and American foreign policy. He was executive editor of the PBS

documentary “The Germans; Portrait of a New Nation” and co-executive producer of the PBS film “Europe’s 9/11”.



**Manfred Gentz** | Dr. Manfred Gentz studied law at the universities of Berlin and Lausanne and graduated with a doctorate in law from the Berlin Free University. In 1970, he joined Daimler-Benz AG where he assumed various positions. In 1983, he was appointed member of the Board of Management of Daimler-Benz AG, responsible for Human Resources at first. From 1990 to 1995 he was also Chief Executive Officer of Daimler-Benz Interservices (debis) in Berlin and he subsequently became Chief Financial Officer of Daimler-Benz AG in 1995. In December 1998, Gentz was appointed CFO in the Board of Management of DaimlerChrysler AG until he retired in December 2004. He is Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zurich Financial Services. In addition to serving on a number of supervisory and advisory boards as well as scientific and cultural institutions, he is Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce Germany. Dr. Gentz was chairman of the board of the Aspen Institute Germany from 1997 to 2006.



**Mircea Geoana** | Mircea Geoana has been the Chairman of the Romanian Social-Democrat Party (PSD) since 2005. He is also the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Romanian Senate. In January 2006, he was elected Chairman of the Socialist International Committee for South-Eastern Europe.

Prior to his political career, Mircea Geoana had a successful career as a diplomat. Appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Romania to the United States of America at age 37, in February 1996, he was the youngest ambassador in the Romanian diplomatic corps. From 2000 to 2004, Mircea Geoana served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania. In this capacity, he also served as OSCE Chairman-in-Office in 2001. Mircea Geoana is an expert on Trans-Atlantic integration. Author of various books and articles on the subject, he also was a NATO fellow on democratic institutions in 1994. He has lectured on foreign policy, transitional economies, and globalization at major American universities and think tanks. Mircea Geoana has a PhD in world economy from the Economic Studies Academy of Bucharest.



**Jamshyd N. Godrej** | Jamshyd N. Godrej graduated in Mechanical Engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology, USA. Mr. Godrej is the Chairman of The Aspen Institute India. He is the Vice President of World Wide Fund for Nature – International and is a Trustee and President Emeritus of World Wide Fund for Nature – India. He is also a Director of the World Resources Institute, USA; and is also past President of Confederation of Indian Industry and past President of the Indian Machine Tool Manufacturers' Association. Mr. Godrej is the Chairman of the CII, Confederation of Indian Industry, Sohrabji Godrej Green Business Centre. The Centre is housed in a LEED Platinum demonstration building which is the first green building in India and was the greenest building in the world at the time when it was rated. The President of India conferred on Mr. Godrej the "Padma Bhushan" on the 3rd of April 2003.

**William B. Inglee** | On February 17, 2003, William B. Inglee was named Vice President, Plans and Policy, Lockheed Martin Washington Operations. His areas of responsibility include relations with the national security community in the Executive Branch, as well as national defense industry groups and foreign policy and defense think tanks. Previously, Mr. Inglee served as Vice President, Security Policy (2000 – 2001) and Vice President, Legislative Affairs (2001-2003). Prior to joining Lockheed Martin, Mr. Inglee served as policy adviser on national security and trade affairs to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable J. Dennis Hastert. As the Speaker's policy adviser, Mr. Inglee was responsible for defense, trade, intelligence and foreign policy issues. From 1995 to 1998, Mr. Inglee served on the Committee on Appropriations staff in the House of Representatives. From 1993 to 1995, Mr. Inglee served as the Executive Director of the 40 member House Wednesday Group in the U.S. House of Representatives. From 1990 to 1993, Mr. Inglee served under Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Conventional Forces and Arms Control Policy. From 1985 to his joining the Department of Defense, Mr. Inglee was a senior professional staff member of the Committee on International Relations in the U.S. House of Representatives. Prior to 1985, he served as Legislative Director to Congressman Tom Coleman and Executive Director of the Republican Research Committee's Task Force on Foreign Policy. Mr. Inglee has also served as a research specialist at the Congressional Research Service. Mr. Inglee holds degrees from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Washington,

D.C. and the Carleton University Center for Russian and European Affairs in Ottawa, Canada.



**Walter Isaacson** | Walter Isaacson is the President and CEO of the Aspen Institute. He has been the Chairman and CEO of CNN and the editor of Time Magazine. He is the author of *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (2007), *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (2003), and *Kissinger: A Biography* (1992) and is the coauthor of *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (1986). Isaacson was born on May 20, 1952, in New Orleans. He is a graduate of Harvard College and of Pembroke College of Oxford University, where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He began his career at the Sunday Times (London) and then the New Orleans Times-Picayune/States-Item. He joined Time Magazine in 1978 and served as a political correspondent, national editor and editor of new media before becoming the magazine's 14th managing editor in 1996. He became Chairman and CEO of CNN in 2001, and then president and CEO of the Aspen Institute in 2003. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, he was appointed by Governor Kathleen Blanco to be the vice-chairman of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. In December 2007, he was appointed by President George W. Bush to be the chairman of the U.S.-Palestinian Partnership, a government and private sector effort to provide economic and educational opportunities for the Palestinian people. He is the Chairman of the Board of Teach for America, and he is on the boards of United Airlines, Tulane University, and Science Service. He is also on the advisory councils of the National Institutes of Health, the National Constitution Center, and the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, DC.



**Josef Joffe** | Dr. Josef Joffe is publisher-editor of the German weekly *Die Zeit*. Previously he was columnist/editorial page editor of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (1985-2000). Abroad, his essays and reviews have appeared in: *New York Review of Books*, *New York Times Book Review*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Commentary*, *New York Times Magazine*, *New Republic*, *Weekly Standard*, *Prospect* (London), *Commentaire* (Paris). His second career has been in academia. In 2007, he was appointed Senior Fellow of Stanford's Institute for International Studies (a professorial position), with which he has been affiliated since 1999. A visiting professor of political science at Stanford since 2004, he is also a fellow

of the University's Hoover Institution. He has also taught at Harvard, Johns Hopkins and the University of Munich. Visiting lecturer at Princeton and Dartmouth. His most recent book is *Überpower: America's Imperial Temptation* (2006, translated into German and French). His articles have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *The National Interest*, *International Security*, *The American Interest* and *Foreign Policy* as well as in professional journals in Germany, Britain and France. He obtained his Ph.D. in Government from Harvard. Dr. Joffe is married to Dr. Christine Brinck Joffe. They have two daughters.



**Claus Kleber** | In February 2003, Dr. Claus Kleber took over as managing editor and anchor of "ZDF Heute Journal", Germany's leading news program. He joined ZDF, the world's largest non-commercial television network, after 12 years as senior correspondent and – later – as Washington bureau chief for ARD, the other German public television network. Before his Washington assignment he served as editor-in-chief of RIAS, the radio station set up by the American Government in West Berlin to provide Eastern Germany with free and independent news. Dr. Kleber started his career in journalism as a reporter and news anchor for ARD German Public Radio in Stuttgart. He first worked in Washington as a radio correspondent for ARD from 1986 to 1988. Dr. Kleber studied political science and law in Tübingen, Germany and Lausanne, Switzerland. He finished law school "magna cum laude" in 1980. He became a member of the bar at the Court of Appeals in Stuttgart in 1984 and completed his studies with a doctorate in law in 1986. He is an alumnus of the "Studienstiftung", the German equivalent of the "Rhodes Scholarship". In his position as managing editor and news anchor, Claus Kleber continues his work in documentaries, covering international affairs. He is married to Renate Kleber, MD. They have two daughters, age 14 and 17. They now live in Wiesbaden, Germany.

**Sue Koffel** | Sue Koffel is founder of The Math Inquiries Project, a privately funded research project currently studying the social marketing issues of algebra education in California. She has degrees in Mathematics and Cybernetic Systems. Sue and her husband, Martin Koffel, have had a long association with the transatlantic relationship through business, government and policy institutions in Europe and the U.S. Sue has studied several European languages and has a particular interest in German. She breeds and raises Hanoverian horses in California from an imported dressage

line. Her husband is Chairman and CEO. of the San Francisco-based URS Corporation, the largest engineering company in the U.S..



**Charles King Mallory IV** | Mr. Mallory received his education at Volksschule in Hamburg, at Westminster School London and at Middlebury College Vermont; he studied for an MA in International Relations at Johns Hopkins University and a PhD at the RAND Graduate School. Mr. Mallory worked at the

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and at Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, where he co-wrote the "Role of Chemical Weapons in Soviet Military Doctrine" with Professor J. Krause of Kiel University. Mr. Mallory was CEO of Credit Suisse Investment Funds Moscow, before joining Allied Capital Corporation - a private equity and mezzanine investment fund. For the five years prior to joining Aspen he was Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.



**Helmut F. Meier** | Helmut Meier is Partner and Senior Vice President of Booz & Company (the former Booz Allen Hamilton) in Düsseldorf and Vienna. In his 26 year consulting career he served in many leadership functions, including the lead of the global Communications, Media and Technology Prac-

tice (CMT) until 2001. He also served on Booz Allen's Board of Directors twice for a three year period (until 2008). Meier has been with Booz & Company since October 1982. Before joining Booz & Company he gained industrial experience in several projects dealing with market and technology development in the communication and information industry. He started his professional career in product and strategic planning at Siemens AG, Munich, and Siemens Corp., Florida, being responsible for the planning of integrated office communication systems. Helmut Meier holds a degree in Computer Science from the University of Bonn and an MBA from INSEAD (Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires), Fontainebleau, France.





**Friedrich Merz** | Born in Brilon, Sauerland, Dr. Friedrich Merz graduated from German high school in 1975 and then studied law and political science at the University of Bonn, after finishing his military service. After passing the bar, Mr. Merz served as a judge in Saarbrücken and has continued to practice

law since that time. In 1986, Mr. Merz joined the German Chemical Industry Association, becoming a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for South Westfalia in 1989 and a member of the German Bundestag in 1994. From 1996-1998, Mr. Merz was Coordinator of the Finance Committee for the CDU/CSU parliamentary party and a member of the federal board of directors of the Christian Democratic Union. From 2000-2002, Mr. Merz was chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary party and from 2000-2004 was a member of the executive committee of the CDU, while serving as deputy chair of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group from 2000-2002. Since January 2005, Mr. Merz has been a partner in the law firm Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw, LLP. Mr. Merz is married to Charlotte Gass and has three children.



**Axel Nawrath** | Dr. Axel Nawrath was appointed State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Finance on 1 March 2006. From 1989 to 1998 Dr. Nawrath worked at the Federal Court of Audit, spending the latter four years as a Counsellor-Member. Dr. Nawrath served as Chief of Staff to both Minister Lafontaine and

Minister Eichel between 1998 and 1999 in the Federal Ministry of Finance. From 1999 to 2003 Dr. Nawrath was Director-General for National and International Financial Markets and Monetary Policy. From March 2003 to March 2006 Dr. Nawrath was Managing Director of Deutsche Börse AG in Frankfurt am Main. In October 2003 he was appointed General Manager of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. From 1999 to 2003 Dr. Nawrath was a Member of the Supervisory Board at Hermes Kreditversicherungs-AG in Hamburg, and from 2001 to 2003 he was also a Member of the Supervisory Board and Member of the Loan Committee at Deutsche Postbank AG in Bonn. He joined the Supervisory Board of Deutsche Bahn AG on March 2006 and has held a seat on the Supervisory Board of the KfW IPEX-Bank GmbH since December 2007. Dr. Nawrath has also been a Member of the Advisory Board of the Institute for the Germany Economy in Cologne since 2006.



**Michel Pébereau** | Michel Pébereau graduated from Ecole Polytechnique and is Inspecteur Général des Finances. He is currently Chairman of the Board of BNP Paribas, and has been Chairman of the European Banking Federation since November 2004. He is Chairman of the International Monetary Conference;

Member of the International Advisory Panel of the Monetary Authority of Singapore; and Member of the International Capital Markets Advisory Committee of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. He was Chairman and CEO of BNP from 1993 to 2000, and set up BNP Paribas during his mandate in August 1999. He was Chairman and CEO of BNP Paribas from 2000 to 2003, and has been Chairman of BNP Paribas since June 2003. In 2001, he was awarded "Financial Executive of the Year" by the Association Nationale des Docteurs des Sciences Economiques (the French national association of PhDs in economics). This award celebrates the manager who contributed the most to the development of the financial business in France during the year. That same year, he was also awarded "Strategist of the Year," by the economic daily paper La Tribune. He was Professor for 20 years at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (IEP) of Paris from 1980 to 2000, and has chaired its Management Committee since 1988. He published a book entitled la politique économique de la France and as a great specialist in science fiction, has critiqued books in La Recherche magazine over many years, and does so today in the Sunday paper Le Journal du Dimanche.



**Friedbert Pflüger** | Member of the CDU parliamentary group in the Berlin House of Representatives. Dr. Friedbert Pflüger studied political science, public and constitutional law and economics at Göttingen, Bonn and Harvard, earning his MA in 1980 and Ph.D. in 1982. He joined the Christian Democratic Union

in 1971. Federal chairman of the Association of Christian Democratic Students, 1977-78. Deputy Chairman of the European Democrat Students (EDS), 1976-78. Member of the federal executive committee of the Junge Union, 1977-85. Since 2000 he has been a member of the federal executive committee of the CDU. From 1981-84 Mr. Pflüger was an assistant to the Governing Mayor of Berlin. He served as spokesman for German President Richard von Weizsäcker from 1984-89. From 1989-91 he was manager of the Matuschka Group, Munich. In 1991 he became deputy chairman of the CDU's federal committee on foreign policy, ascending to the committee's chairmanship in

1999. From 1990 until 2006 he was a member of the Bundestag where he served on the Defense Committee and the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Disarmament policy spokesman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, 1994-98 and foreign policy spokesman 2002-05. Chairman of the Bundestag Committee on the Affairs of the European Union, 1998-2002. Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Defence 2005-06. Chairman of the CDU parliamentary group in the Berlin House of Representatives, 2006-08. Since 2006 he has also been a member of the National Executive Committee of the CDU.



**Jürgen Reuning** | Jürgen Reuning was born in Brunn on 20 May 1943. He studied economics at the University of Darmstadt and the Technical University of Berlin. In 1970 he earned his MBA from the Columbia Graduate School of Business in New York. In 1970 he began working for the OTIS Corporation. After

various international positions he returned to OTIS Germany in 1980 to become the Director of Distribution and in 1989 CEO of Otis Germany. In 1997 he was named Senior Vice President (later President) of the Central European Area of Otis. In 2004 he retired. He served as Vice President of the American Chamber of Commerce Germany for 12 years, until 2003. Since 1992 he has been President of the Friends of the Aspen Institute. He later became a Member of the Board of Aspen Germany. He is married and lives in Berlin.

**John P. Schmitz** | John Schmitz represents U.S. and European companies in complex international transactions and regulatory matters. John's clients include the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Deutsche Welle (German TV), General Electric, Bayer AG, Bertelsmann, Bosch GmbH, Gillette and Pfizer. Between 1985 and 1993 he served as Deputy Counsel to George H. W. Bush in both the White House and the Office of the Vice President. Following his law school graduation John was both Law Clerk to The Honorable Antonin Scalia, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia (1983-1984) and Special Assistant to William Baxter, Assistant Attorney General for Antitrust, U.S. Department of Justice (1981-1982). Prior to law school he was Legislative Assistant to U.S. Representative Goodloe E. Byron (1977) and Legislative Aide to U.S. Congressman Charles W. Sandman, Jr. (1973-1975). John has also held a number of high-profile fellowships. John is fluent in German and has received numerous German-related honors including Order of Merit of the Federal Re-

public of Germany (Deutsches Bundesverdienstkreuz), awarded in 1990 by German President Richard von Weizsäcker.



**Robert K. Steel** | Robert K. Steel was sworn in as the Under Secretary of the Treasury for Domestic Finance on October 10, 2006. In that capacity, he served as the principal adviser to the Secretary on matters of domestic finance and led the Department's activities with respect to the domestic financial system, fiscal

policy and operations, governmental assets and liabilities, and related economic and financial matters. Robert K. Steel retired from Goldman Sachs as a vice chairman of the firm on February 1, 2004. He joined Goldman Sachs in 1976 and served in the Chicago office until his transfer to London in 1986. In London he founded the Equity Capital Markets group for Europe and was extensively involved in privatization and capital raising efforts for European corporations and governments. He later assumed the position of head of Equities for Europe. In 1994 he relocated to New York and served as head of the Equities Division from 1998-2001 until his appointment as a vice chairman of the firm. He became a partner in 1988 and joined the Management Committee in 1999. Upon his retirement from Goldman Sachs, he assumed the position of advisory director for the firm and then senior director in December 2004. From February 2004 to September 2006 Mr. Steel served as a senior fellow at the Center for Business and Government at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Mr. Steel received his undergraduate degree from Duke University and his MBA from the University of Chicago. He resides in Connecticut and Washington, D.C. with his wife and three daughters.



**Horst Teltschik** | Dr. Horst Teltschik is Chairman of Teltschik Associates GmbH. He is also the former president of Boeing Germany. Prior to serving in this position, he was a member of the Board of Management of the BMW Group specializing in economic and governmental affairs, and was chairman of the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt in Munich. Dr. Teltschik also served as chief executive officer of the Bertelsmann Foundation in Gütersloh. In his role as a public servant, he worked as ministerial director at the German Federal Chancellery; was head of the Directorate General for Foreign and Intra-German Relations, Development Policy, and External Security; and served as national security advisor to the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl. Dr. Teltschik is a member of the University Council of the Munich Academy of Arts, and also of the International Advisory Board of the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, USA. A lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at Technical University Munich, Dr. Teltschik has received honorary professorships and doctorates from the Technical University Munich; the University of Budapest, Hungary; and Sogang University, Seoul, Republic of Korea.

**Giulio Tremonti** | Giulio Tremonti is Vice President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and Chairman of Aspen Institute Italia. He is currently a professor at the University of Pavia's Faculty of Law as well as co-editor of the *Rivista di Diritto Finanziario e Scienza delle Finanze* (Financial Law and Science Review) and a member of the moral science section, of the Istituto Lombardo Accademia di Scienze e Lettere. He has been a Senior Teaching Fellow at the Institute of European and Comparative Law at Oxford University and has had work published by *Il Mulino*, *Mondadori*, *Laterza*. Mr. Tremonti has participated in a number of national commissions including the Italian-Vatican Commission. He was president of the Commission for Currency Exchange Control Reform. In 1994 he was elected to the Lower House of Parliament (Chamber of Deputies) for the XII Legislature. He was re-elected in the two following legislatures (XIII and XIV). He was Finance Minister in the first Berlusconi Government (1994). He was also a member of the Joint Parliamentary Commission for the Reform of the Italian Constitution as well as chairman, during the Italian term, of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the G7 and the Ecofin Council.



**Karsten D. Voigt** | Karsten D. Voigt has been the Coordinator of German-North American Cooperation at the German Federal Foreign Office since January of 1999. He majored in history and in German and Scandinavian studies at the Universities of Hamburg, Copenhagen and Frankfurt. Mr. Voigt became actively engaged in politics at an early age. He accompanied witnesses during the Auschwitz trial proceedings and took part in the Anti-Vietnam war demonstrations. From 1969 until 1973 he served as Chairman of the German Young Socialists Organization. From 1984 until 1995 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the German Social Democratic Party and from 1985 to 1994, member of the Executive Committee of the Party of European Socialists. From 1976 to 1998, he served as a Member of the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) for the Social Democrats (SPD). From 1977 to 1998 he also served as a Member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, of which he was President between 1994 and 1996. Mr. Voigt's expertise is in the fields of foreign policy and security. From 1983 to 1998, he was foreign policy spokesman of the SPD parliamentary group.



**Klaus Wowereit** | Klaus Wowereit is the Governing Mayor of Berlin. He was elected to office on 16 June 2001 and won reelection on 23 November 2006. He is a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). As Berlin is both Germany's capital and one of the country's 16 federal states, Wowereit serves as mayor of the city and head of the federal state. Since 23 November 2006, he has also been the Senator (State Minister) for Cultural Affairs. Wowereit attended the Free University of Berlin, where he received his law degree in 1981. He served from 1979 to 1984 as an assembly member in Berlin's Tempelhof district and worked for the Senate Department of the Interior from 1981 to 1984. At 30, he became the city's youngest municipal council member in the Tempelhof district, and in 1995 he was elected to the city's parliament. He served as deputy head of the SPD parliamentary group in the Berlin House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999 and subsequently as their leader from December 1999 to June 2001. On the federal level, he was appointed President of the Bundesrat, the upper house of the German parliament, for a one-year term from 1 November 2001 to 31 October 2002. On 1 January 2007, he started a four-year term as Germany's Commissioner for Franco-German Cultural Affairs, giving him cabinet status in the federal government.

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# FINANCIAL RESULTS

## Balance Sheet (Euro) (UNAUDITED)

	2008	2007
<b>Property, Plant &amp; Equipment</b>		
Tangible Assets	33.921,75	22.524,00
<b>Sub-Total Property, Plant &amp; Equipment</b>	<b>34.529,85</b>	<b>22.524,00</b>
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Receivables	7.658,37	50.299,88
Other Short-Term Assets	136.518,60	3.018,94
Cash & Cash Equivalents	283.872,95	280.562,75
<b>Subtotal Current Assets</b>	<b>428.049,92</b>	<b>333.881,57</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>465.363,70</b>	<b>356.405,57</b>
<b>Shareholders' Equity</b>		
Paid in Capital	86.330,01	20.297,48
Retained Earnings	148.604,04	85.730,66
<b>Sub-Total Equity</b>	<b>234.934,05</b>	<b>106.028,14</b>
<b>Reserves</b>	<b>42.285,00</b>	<b>10.391,51</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Liabilities to Financial Institutions	7.969,31	0,00
Liabilities to Sponsors	45.478,21	155.148,61
Liabilities to Personnel	47.096,92	12.838,47
Other Liabilities	87.600,21	71.998,84
<b>Sub-Total Liabilities</b>	<b>188.144,65</b>	<b>239.985,92</b>
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Shareholders' Equity</b>	<b>465.367,70</b>	<b>356.405,57</b>

## 2007

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*View from the Aspen Institute over Schwanenwerder*

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The Aspen Institute wishes to thank *Mr. Leonard A. Lauder, the Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH and the U.S. Department of State* for their support of these programs.

Dr. Frederick Barton, *Senior Adviser & Co-Director, Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies - CSIS*

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(Above) Alexander Count Lambsdorff, *Member of the European Parliament, Brussels*

His Royal Highness Prince Hamzah bin Al Hussein *of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* and (left) Dr. Guenther Nonnenmacher, *Editor Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

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Prof. Dr. Heiner Hänggi, *Assistant Director, Head of Research, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and Dmitry P. Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations*

(Above, left)

Dmitry P. Titov, *Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations and Bo Asplund, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan*



Hekmat Karzai, *Director, Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, Kabul*

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**Academic Director: Prof. Dr. Joachim Krause, Deputy Director: Dr. Benjamin Schreer**

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## International State Building and Reconstruction Efforts Experience Gained and Lessons Learned, Petersberg, September 18-21, 2008

### Introduction

Post-conflict related efforts by the international community towards state (re)building and reconstruction of society and the economy have become a more or less regular feature of international politics since the early 1990s. The demand for such international efforts seems to be rising rather than diminishing. Many large and powerful states consider the establishment of sound state structures and livable economies something that furthers international peace and stability. The list of states that have become subject to international state-building and reconstruction efforts (ISBRE)<sup>1</sup> is lengthy: starting with Namibia, Angola, Haiti and Somalia in the early 1990s the list now includes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Afghanistan, Timor Leste, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo (the former Zaire) and also the Palestine National Authority. Future candidates for ISBRE are Georgia, Lebanon, Sudan (South Sudan, Darfur), Chad, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, North Korea, Nepal, Eritrea and others. The efforts of the EU and the OSCE to reconstruct state institutions and national societies in the Baltic States after their independence in 1991 can also be counted as ISBRE. The increased demand for ISBRE is related to the sharp increase in intra-state violence and conflict, which has its roots in the domestic situation in certain countries – mainly in failed or failing states, or states that have been taken over by dubious forces. International efforts towards state building and reconstruction are not a recent historical occurrence. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the states cooperating within the framework of the Concert of Europe in a few cases created states or established state authorities in disputed areas. Greece (1830-32), Belgium (1831) and Albania (1912/13) were created in this way. After World War II, West Germany, Austria and Japan were rebuilt as well.

What causes the international community (or at least a sizeable and powerful group of states) to care about the internal predicament of a given country and to cooperate in order to establish state structures and to reignite its economy? In looking at history one can find at least three different strategic reasons:

- A territory without functioning state authority that is subject to conflicting claims by neighboring states shall be rendered an effective state in order to make it viable and, thus, safe against foreign claims (Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo).
- A state that has been torn apart by domestic war or ethnic strife, and which has been thrown into a downward spiral of economic privation and violence, is to be resuscitated in order to avoid further suffering and, in particular, to prevent contagious effects (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo).
- A state which was a threat to others because of its failing political institutions and which became the subject of an international intervention (the notorious phrase “regime change” is almost unavoidable) is to be re-established in a way that future threats to international peace can be avoided (Germany and Japan after World War II, Iraq under Saddam Hussein).

However, looking at recent cases of ISBRE, one is left with the impression that strategic logic was involved only to a limited degree. Rather, it seems that the international community (mainly the western states) started its international state-building and reconstruction efforts in the early 1990s without much forethought. Often, the pressure of public opinion and the logic of ceasefire agreements drove these efforts. Indicators of the absence of strategic thinking include the stress or lack of exit-strategies, the fear of mission creep, or the build-up of artificial limits and taboos instead of long-term reasoning about the strategic opportunities and risks of ISBRE. The most conspicuous event in this regard was the announcement by the Bush administration that it would not engage in “nation building” at a time when it was preparing for regime change in Iraq.

Only recently has serious thinking about the strategic dimensions of ISBRE set in, both in the U.S. and in Europe. This was occasioned by the problems the international community faces in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq (although in Iraq the situation is different, as only a small group of states has been involved). Both Afghanistan and Iraq pose a special category of problem: the ISBRE are confronted with a sizeable insurgency and with terrorist attacks directed at those who are there to help the country. In many European states as well as in the U.S. and Canada these developments have led policy makers and experts to question the whole logic of ISBRE. Some favor a rapid withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq; others have stated that they would rather prefer to up the ante, send more troops and invest more money into the given country.

<sup>1</sup>As concerns terminology: there are different ways to name the subjects of interest of this conference: “peace-building”, “peacekeeping”, “peace support operations”, “international state-building efforts”, “security, transition and reconstruction”, “nation building” or “state building”. None of these terms covers the whole substance. The title “international state-building and reconstruction efforts” (ISBRE) is used despite these misgivings, because it allows us to focus on the efforts by a given international community of states and non-state actors towards building a state in a given society where state structures have been destroyed or severely compromised and where political institutions, society and the economy have to be reconstructed or constructed anew.

## The Aspen European Strategy Forum

Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2008, the Aspen Institute Germany, in cooperation with the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Kiel, Germany, brought together over forty participants at the Steigenberger Grand-hotel Petersberg, Koenigswinter/Bonn for a discussion of the current challenges in state building and post-conflict reconstruction. The participants represented twelve countries and various universities, international organizations and institutions. During eight sessions, speakers presented their thoughts and concerns on the most challenging aspects of state building: counterinsurgency, security sector reform, democracy building and market economies. Each speaker's presentation was commented upon by an expert practitioner. These experts' selection was based upon their practical experience at NATO, the UN or at other relevant institutions and/or ministries. The discussions were chaired by three outstanding, senior German statesmen: *Dr. Horst Teltschik* (Teltschik Associates GmbH), *Karsten Voigt* (Coordinator of German-American Cooperation, Federal Foreign Office), and *Dr. Günther Nonnenmacher* (Editor, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*). The event was sponsored by Leonard A. Lauder and supported by Lufthansa.

The purpose of this conference was to address several dimensions of ISBRE: *operational* issues (such as how to improve civil-military cooperation, or how best to finance infrastructure projects); *policy* issues (i.e. how to reform the security sector of a given state, how to support democratic institution building) and big, strategic issues (i.e. is it really possible and strategically imperative to engage in ISBRE? If we want to continue with ISBRE, what strategic choices do we have to make?). This conference dealt mainly with the policy issues and with the strategic decisions, while recognizing that these cannot be disassociated from the operational issues. Given the current international situation, the discussions focused on the biggest issues of the day: Afghanistan and Iraq.

The conference focused on the three main clusters of ISBRE:

- *Security*: Without security, most observers agree, there will be no successful state building and reconstruction efforts, particularly after civil wars. This cluster has two elements: reform of the security sector (police, military, militias, intelligence) in a way that advances effectiveness, impartiality and democratic political control and protection of ISBRE against spoilers, insurgents and terrorists.

- *Economic Progress*: This cluster has many elements, ranging from the creation of basic infrastructure and utility services, to regulation and enabling legislation to attract foreign direct investment. The fight against corruption also plays a big role.
- *Democratic Institutions and State Building*: The issue is how to establish political and state institutions that are effective and responsive and which are able to constitute a new social contract between those who rule the country and those who will be ruled.

The conference consisted of eight sessions, which were structured around these clusters.

*Session one* was called "Lessons Unlearned: Why Most International Reconstruction Efforts in the Past Have Failed" and was devoted to discussing broad lessons learned (or unlearned) from recent experiences. The discussion was based on a paper by *Claire Lockhart* and *Ashraf Ghani* from the Institute for State Effectiveness (Washington, D.C.), who pled for a rediscovery of the state and of the importance of state institution building. *Espen Eide*, State Secretary, Ministry of Defense, Norway commented from a policy perspective.

*The second session* dealt with the "Ambitions of International State Building and Reconstruction Efforts". It was based on a paper by *Richard Barton* from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, Washington, D.C.) and focused on how to measure success and progress. His paper was commented on by *John R. Martin*, Executive Director, Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, and by *Hekmat Karzai*, Director of the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, Kabul.

*The third session* was devoted to the special problem of "Fighting Insurgencies and Terrorists in Post-Conflict Situations", and was introduced by a paper written by *Conrad Crane*, director of the U.S. Army Military History Institute in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The discussion was opened by remarks by General *Egon Ramms*, Commander Allied Joint Force Command, Brunssum, Netherlands.

*Session four* dealt with security issues again, this time the focus was on "Establishing Security in Conflict-Ridden Societies: How to Reform the Security Apparatus". *Heiner Hänggi* from the Geneva-based Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) presented the introductory paper; it was commented upon by *Dmitri Titov*, Assistant Secretary General of the UN, Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

During *session five* the subject was “Creating Market Economies in Post-Conflict Situations – How to Cope with Deficient Infrastructure, Black Market Economies, Organized Crime, Overregulation and State Corruption”. The discussions were based on a paper by *Keith Crane*, of the RAND Corporation, Washington, D.C. The paper was commented upon by *Joachim Rücker*, former Head of the UN Mission in Kosovo and by *Bo Asplund*, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kabul.

During *the sixth session* participants looked at the possibilities of “Creating Functional State Institutions and Democracy”. This session was introduced by a paper written by *Timothy Sisk* from Denver University, which was commented upon by *Lakhdar Brahimi*, Former Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The *seventh session* was an attempt to sum up experience from various peace-building and ISBRE efforts and was based on a paper by *Winrich Kühne* from the Center for International Peacekeeping, Berlin, Germany, titled “Improving Peacekeeping Operations and Peace-Building: Key Political and Military Issues”. His paper was commented on by General *Heinrich Brauss*, NATO-Headquarters, Mons, Belgium.

*Session eight* was based on a paper by *Joachim Krause* from Kiel University, which tried to summarize recommendations that were made during the conference. Krause’s paper was commented on by *Michael Dziedzic* from the U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C.

There were two additional events on the program: during the evening of September 18<sup>th</sup>, at dinner, *Bo Asplund*, Deputy Head of the United Nations’ Mission in Afghanistan spoke on the current situation in Afghanistan, and on the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> – again at dinner – *Lt. General (ret.) Ricardo S. Sanchez*, former Commander of Coalition Joint Task Force 7, in Iraq, gave an address on his experiences during the time of his duty in Iraq.

## Results of the Conference

The conference was instrumental in identifying common problems and devising solutions for these problems. At a minimum the following conclusions and lessons – divided into a policy-dimension and the strategic dimension – can be drawn.

## The Policy Dimension

*Understanding the Environment:* All participants agreed that state-building efforts have to be context-specific. The historical, social and economic background of the country of concern has to be analyzed in detail. Of great importance is the host country’s situation, i.e. whether it finds itself in a long-term democratic process, in transition from war to peace, or just in a post-conflict situation (e.g. after a ceasefire agreement). In particular, one has to be aware of the nature of the preceding conflict (e.g. hot and bloody civil war with many atrocities or short and limited fighting), of the socio-economic situation and of the provisions of the relevant agreements by which the conflict was ended. This relates not only to civilian personnel, but increasingly to military staff. Today’s international military operations require a greater emphasis on skills such as language and cultural awareness than does conventional warfare. Hence, efforts concerning intelligence-driven operations are crucial.

*Local Ownership:* Ideally, reconstruction efforts should be driven and shaped by local actors, who are supported by the international community. External involvement should be focused on assistance such as financial aid, technical advice and training activities. The involvement of host nation contributors at all levels is essential, in order to meet political goals and establish critical legitimacy. The reality is often just the opposite, i.e. external actors force the local opponents to cooperate and they are also the ones who determine the direction of reforms. In most cases of ISBRE there is no clear strategy for transition to local ownership. As a result, major decisions on political institution building or on the recovery of the economy are often made by donors and international organizations before any local involvement takes place. So far, a clear and comprehensive formula for early participation of local forces and a later transfer of responsibility has not been found.

*Diversity of Actors:* International efforts in state building and reconstruction have witnessed the involvement of a multitude of actors: foreign diplomats and United Nations personnel, international military forces, international humanitarian and development agencies as well as a plethora of national and international NGOs and civil society groups. With the growing complexity of international peace missions and the expanded number of international actors and approaches involved, the question of coordination has become a key factor for the success of these missions. There is an increasing need for collaboration to overcome the often marked cleavages between relief, development and security organizations in order to provide

for a coherent and effective donor strategy. Although, progress has been made in this field (such as the OECD Development Assistance Committee guidelines on security sector reform or the framework documents produced by the EU and OSCE) existing approaches have to be enhanced.

*Failure to implement a holistic approach:* State-building aims at creating or strengthening state structures and institutions, improving state actors' governance capabilities and expanding their capacities for action. However, United Nations coordinated missions often tend to prioritize only certain aspects of state-building. International actors' strategies center alternatively on security, or on the rule of law and human rights or on economic and social development. Typically, functional differentiation among ministries or departments of donor countries translates into different priorities for ISBRE in the host country. There are also cases of inter- and intra-institutional competition over resources and policy approaches.

*Market Economies in Post-Conflict Societies:* The task of ISBRE in rebuilding an effective economic sector is extremely complex. Living economies cannot be created within months or a few years. However, it is possible to provide the impulse needed for economic growth and to avoid hurdles inhibiting economic growth that are typical of many underdeveloped countries, such as corruption, nepotism, bureaucratization and feudal structures. There are at least a few economic functions which have to be established, among them: (a) stabilization of the currency; (b) creation of a functioning commercial banking system; (c) devising a system by which to fund government expenses; (d) establishing a workable civil service; (e) creating an infrastructure that allows the economy to grow again; (f) devising contracting and procurement provisions that avoid corruption; and (g) programs that help the private sector to flourish. Continuous donor support is also needed.

*State-Building vs. Democratization:* There should be no definite sequencing of either state-building or democratization. State-building and democracy-building should go hand in hand, since electoral processes are essential for generating the legitimacy of any government. For each individual country the sequence of steps towards democratization has to be established as part of a complex political process. Functioning models from established Western democracies cannot simply be exported. Democracy needs to be accepted and practiced by the local society and the process of establishing local ownership is much more difficult to achieve than often presumed. Programs have to be implemented making people familiar with democracy, with

party politics, election processes and democracy on a local level. Otherwise progress in democratization might stop as soon as the international community turns its attention from the given country. Democratization is doomed to failure if people perceive only the challenges and setbacks of the process. But it can be successful if the local society benefits from progress – especially in terms of living standards and security. A sufficiently capable state should emerge that facilitates human development and provides basic security and protection of its citizens.

*Fewer Foreign Consultants:* Political pressure to produce early results often entails the influx of foreign consultants on a large scale. In many cases these foreign consultants have had a rather negative effect on the overall mission. International organizations do not always have sufficient staff to help reconstitute state institutions in post-conflict situations. In most cases, the intervening authorities draw on staff from donor country ministries or employ independent technical and administrative experts and consultants to assist in training, mentoring, and – in some cases – operating the new institutions. Calling in additional consultants is not only costly, but also damaging in terms of building up sustainable local ownership.

*Political Legitimacy and Rule of Law:* Today there are two countries where ISBRE are faced with insurgencies or even terrorist threats: Afghanistan and Iraq. It is imperative that the logic of fighting insurgents does not take precedence over the overall political tasks. Counterinsurgents must conduct a thorough socio-cultural analysis to determine what the local population perceives as legitimate government. Differing standards must be understood and reconciled, which may present difficulties for Western governments placing high importance on democratic practices and liberal values. Acting in accordance with a legal system established in line with local culture and practices enhances the legitimacy of the government and of the intervening powers. Illegitimate acts by government officials or security forces can undermine progress and often serve as key mobilization tools for insurgents. The decision-making power should have clear lines of command (with clear political responsibility) and should be subject to popular control and a system of accountability.

*Unity of Effort:* Since ISBRE are undertaken by a myriad of different actors, it is hard to avoid the fact that insurgents try to exploit cleavages, in particular between military and civilian components of the international presence. Unity of command would be the best way to solve this problem. This having been said, the international community should strive for better unity of effort which is



much more likely to be achievable. Military units must be prepared to commit considerable resources to liaison duties with all the various players. Some progress has been made in civil-military cooperation, but the results have often been far from satisfying. A viable and convincing concept for arriving at a unified, holistic approach is currently out of reach and the necessary political will to implement a radical reform appears to be absent.

### The Strategic Dimension

*Time Horizon and Exit Strategy:* State-building is resource intensive – it always requires considerable money, manpower, and time. Most ISBRE, however, have suffered under extremely short political time horizons. This stems from political caution, budgetary rules and the demand for financial control, which are political attitudes very common in Western democracies. Unrealistic time frames have the detrimental effect that missions are undertaken in a precipitous manner. Short time frames also create expectations that no one is able to fulfill – both in the host country and within the international community. ISBRE-strategies have to be realistic in terms of timeframes and resources; otherwise the international community loses its credibility. Furthermore, discussions about early withdrawal are usually counter-productive, if not dangerous. They can lead to increased insurgent activity and to a loss of faith by local citizens in the readiness of the international community to support them in their endeavor to reform their society and their political institutions. Instead of exit strategies there is a need for transition strategies, which clearly spell out the targets that should be achieved, in combination with realistic timeframes and an appropriate framework in terms of human and financial resources. Some progress has been made, but more decisive efforts need to be undertaken.

*Budgets:* The resources necessary to have a real impact on societal change and on state building are, in most cases of ISBRE, remarkably higher than the amounts that international donors are ready to spend. More often than not the readiness to pay for the rebuilding of war-torn countries has been quite limited – both in terms of resources and of time.

*Overstretch:* Through the rapid rise in the number of theaters, actors, tasks and bureaucracies since the 1990s, the pool of available personnel, logistical and political resources has reached its limits. Interventions have become lengthy and very complex in terms of demands and risks. Therefore overstretch has become a basic reality of ISBRE.

However, there is room for reform. Although the Europeans have more men and women under arms than the U.S. and although they are not involved in Iraq (except for a few formations), they seem to be much shorter of troops than the U.S. This is due to deficiencies in equipment and manpower, but is also the consequence of the extremely short rotation periods of the EU troops. The European states have to devise ways to overcome this artificial shortage of manpower and they have to invest more in equipment and transportation.

*Robustness of military stabilization efforts:* The extent to which armed forces are allowed to use force beyond personal self-defense as part of ISBRE is one of the most contentious issues and is a source of friction among states. From one perspective, a clear line has to be drawn, otherwise the line between peacekeeping and war fighting is blurred thereby contradicting the very essence of peacekeeping, i.e. preventing violence and providing peace. From another point of view it may be imperative that armed forces are able (and ready) to respond at all levels of violence, otherwise spoilers, insurgents or terrorists might feel encouraged. So far, existing peacekeeping and peace support operation doctrines, except the U.S. doctrine, put emphasis on consent and impartiality as the guiding principles for the use of force and draw a clear line between war fighting and peacekeeping. Consent and impartiality, together with legitimacy and credibility, have surely proven to be the decisive variables in maintaining the support of the majority of the population and its leaders. But, stabilization forces have to be effective, for instance in fighting spoilers. Effectiveness versus impartiality of a mission is a highly difficult balance to strike in a counterinsurgency. In Afghanistan, for instance, the fine line between support operations and war fighting cannot be drawn anymore. A new kind of mandate for stabilization forces, thus, is needed, which balances the demand for efficiency with the need to keep as much consent and impartiality as possible.

The discussions provided insights into upcoming opportunities and challenges in each of the different dimensions of ISBRE. Some participants discovered that many problems of ISBRE originate far more in the states that constitute the international community than they do in the host countries. The main problems sound familiar: very short political timeframes (1 – 4 years at most), lack of resources, lack of endurance and patience and a desire for symbolic actions instead of sustainable strategies. One is reminded of Alexis de Toqueville, who as early as 1835, stated that democratic states have difficulties in devising and implementing long-term foreign policy goals.

In conclusion, it is imperative that the building or rebuilding of states is resilient (able to manage future conflict) and responsive (able to deliver security, protection and development). Both of these attributes require inclusive, participatory governance, accountability, and constructive state-society relations. Democratization and state building require the creation of conflict-resilient, responsive states that can resist future conflicts and crises that potentially renew civil war. For this reason, it is useful to continue to think of state building tasks as inherently linked with the objectives of democratization namely: participation, inclusion, and accountability. ■



*Lieutenant General (ret.) Ricardo S. Sanchez,  
Former Commander, Coalition Joint Task Force 7, Iraq*





Aharon Abramovitch, *Director General,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State of Israel*



Amr Hamzawy, *Senior Associate, Carnegie Middle East Center*



Hans-Ulrich Klose, *Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the German  
Bundestag* and Stefan Cornelius, *Foreign Editor, Süddeutsche Zeitung*



Anette Riedel, *Deutschlandradio*



Olaf Böhnke, *Senior Program Officer, The Aspen Institute Germany*

Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte, *Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Vienna*

# ASPEN IRAN CIVIL SOCIETY PROGRAM

**Senior Program Officer: Olaf Böhnke**

**Aspen's Iran Civil Society Program invites leaders of civil society, policy makers, business people and media representatives to discuss issues such as economic prospects, human rights, democratic development and free media at small informal meetings in Europe, America and the region on a regular basis. We aim to improve mutual understanding, educate one another on current developments, and ensure continuing communication despite international political tensions. By bringing together policy makers with representatives of civil society and the private sector we also aim to learn about social and political developments in the region and promote open dialogue between the Middle East, Europe and America.**

[aspeninstitute.de/iran](http://aspeninstitute.de/iran)

Aspen launched its program of dialog with Iranian civil society in early 2007. Curiosity about a country and people that is so rich in history and culture and yet has a government that has frequently adopted such a hostile posture towards the rest of the world was the reason for launching this very successful series of events. Iran's nuclear program, its influence in the greater Middle East and its support for groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah have led to a situation where many in the West perceive Iran as a threat to stability.

Quite apart from the major political conflicts and debates, Iran is also notable for a civil society that is unique and very active in comparison with the rest of the region. The Iranian women's movement has almost one hundred years of history behind it. Trade unions, journalists, students and various other social movements have also been solid components of the social structure for which Iran is known for quite some time. These facts motivated the Aspen Institute to complement the lively debate in Europe and the United States about the goals and dangers of the Iranian nuclear program with a direct exchange with members of Iranian civil society. Consistent with Aspen's longstanding tradition, leading members of civil society, policy makers, intellectuals, representatives from business and the media from Iran have been invited to small, confidential, closed-

door conferences in pursuit of this goal. The purpose is to exchange ideas and discuss first hand information on current social developments, economic prospects, and the status of human rights, democratization and the media in Iran. The mutual understanding and trust that Aspen builds in the process is intended to ensure that a continuing dialog between the Near and Middle East, Europe and the United States of America is maintained, even in times of international political crisis.

So far, from the inception of the program in April 2007 up to the end of 2008, Aspen has organized nine small- and medium-sized conferences in Germany and abroad involving more than 200 international participants. The first meetings had a broad thematic focus that included discussion of topics such as the economic situation, human rights, the political role of religion and the clergy and Iran's regional competition with its neighbors. The widespread skepticism and reservation Aspen encountered in Iran towards a western institution inviting participants from Iran to conferences made it necessary for Aspen to focus on one or two target groups in order to be able to build failing confidence via repeated invitations to a continuing dialog. For this reason, Aspen focused its efforts on the women's movement and on journalists, bloggers and media representatives from the end of 2007 onwards. Both groups are



key components of civil society and shape current social developments in Iran in an active and enduring fashion.

The role of the women's movement in Iran has been the focus of two conferences to date. Doyennes from various NGOs, the press, academia and of varying expertise from the entire Islamic world, Europe and the United States of America discussed the whole spectrum of feminist activity in Iran. The discussion started with a comprehensive analysis of how Islamic feminist movements from North Africa to Southeast Asia define themselves and of the experience that they have garnered to date. Secular feminists characterized the concept of "Islamic feminism" as an oxymoron in this discussion, arguing that equality of sexes stood in diametric opposition to the patriarchal world view of Islam. The latter was said to reject the concept of women's rights. The majority of participants rejected this argumentation and maintained that it is quite possible to combine Islam and feminism and that could be proven via numerous examples from the region whether they are in Morocco or in Malaysia. Particular attention was paid to the special situation in Iran in the course of the discussions. The Family Law of 1976 was said to have improved women's rights in Iran in an enduring fashion. But the new power relationships that came about after the 1979 Islamic revolution were said to have rolled these advances back.

While the role of women was once again the subject of lively commentary in society and in the Iranian parliament during the reform era of president Mohammad Khatami, these same activities have been banned by the government of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. To this day, women's rights activists in Iran are subject to significant restrictions and prohibitions in their work. The second conference in this series, concentrated on an analysis of the potential for a legal reform that would offer more equality of rights and opportunity for women in Iran. More specifically, efforts and reform suggestions in the areas of marriage and divorce law and special rights for children were discussed. The twenty-two international participants also discussed the disadvantages of gender segregation such as practiced in buses and universities and internal developments in Iran's active women's rights groups. A whole series of promising ideas and suggestions resulted from the discussion, which the participants thankfully took home with them for inclusion in their future work. At the request of many participants – particularly those from Iran – the series will be continued with another conference in 2009.

The conference series "Digital Media and Journalism in Iran" can, by now, look back on its fourth successfully concluded conference. The target group primarily involves

Iranian and international journalists, bloggers, academics and filmmakers. The over-arching theme of this series of events is the question: "how can freedom of conscience and expression be maintained in an authoritarian and restrictive state, such as Iran?" To this end, the participants examined issues such as computer and Internet security, the filtering of e-mails and of Internet websites, and state censorship of newspaper, radio and Internet journalists. The role and influence of foreign Farsi-language media such as newspapers, radio and television transmissions and weblogs on public opinion in Iran was repeatedly the subject of lively debate. The spectrum is extremely broad and is largely defined by Iranian exiles in Europe and the United States. Journalistic approaches can often differ markedly. While some deliberately adopt a very moderate style of reporting on events in Iran, others deliberately and clearly highlight Iran's political and humanitarian deficits. Visiting Iranian participants repeatedly gave credible accounts of the difficult working conditions for journalists critical of the political system in Iran. The Internet offers them some opportunity, as anonymity, with some limitations, is still available there. Unfortunately, a large discrepancy between the lively, virtual, debates on political reform in the Internet and opportunities to turn these debates into action on the streets still prevails. This form of publicly expressing one's opinion continues to entail many dangers. This was one of the reasons why the question "which forms of assistance for journalists and bloggers are appropriate and sensible as opposed to dangerous and flaky?" repeatedly made its way onto the agenda.

Aspen's long-term goal is to build and maintain a sustainable network of Iranians – both in Iran and abroad – and policy experts, political decision makers, journalists and members of civil society in Europe and the United States of America. The principal purpose is to create opportunities to exchange ideas and insights in a politically neutral confidential and respectful atmosphere, to establish contacts and to build and strengthen awareness of the fact that the challenges we jointly face require cooperative action. The network that Aspen has created is increasingly being used by Iranians to introduce their own ideas and to cooperate in shaping the dialog with and about civil society. Aspen will convene at least four more conferences with guests from Iran before the end of 2009; their purpose is to improve understanding of events within Iran both inside and outside of the country. The forthcoming Iranian presidential elections will, no doubt, be an important factor in assessing the prospects for greater freedom and political participation in Iran. ■

## Roundtable Conference Berlin, April 18-20, 2007

### Executive Summary

This conference succeeded in laying the groundwork for Aspen's series of discussions on Iran. Almost every participant was also a 'session speaker', which encouraged both intense debate and full participation. The conference covered topics from civil society development to the role of the media, from opinions on nationality to religious power structures, and from the economy to student movements. Two basic strains existed throughout the conference. The first was that Iranians, even those who are very pro-democracy and pro-Western, are interested in finding solutions that fit their nation's history and interests. The second was the discussion surrounding modern versus traditional Iran and the overlaps or conflicts relating to this problem.

All of the participants gave positive feedback regarding the diversity of participants and high level of participation from individuals. Some future topics suggested by our participants were:

1. The religious power struggle and structure in Iran,
2. The internal dynamics of the Iranian political system,
3. The dynamic between Persian Gulf states and Iran,
4. The economic perspectives of women,
5. The role of new media.

### Session I: Iran & the West – National Interests or “Axis of Evil”?

This discussion began with an introduction to the problems and perspectives of Iran. The U.S. approach is not perceived as successful at the moment. In regards to the nuclear issue, one speaker said that Iran would need to define its national interests and allow supervision of nuclear facilities. In order to ensure this, the West needs to pursue a diplomatic path. Within Iran, the nuclear topic is seen as a modernity and energy security issue. Iranian dependence on German trade and the need to keep human rights as a priority were also discussed.

Another key topic was the tension between state and country in Iran. Within the country, the strains between tradition and modernity, or moderation and force, make it difficult to find a common denominator. Many participants mentioned the differences between the regime's interests

(the elite themselves) versus those of modern civil society, which is seen as a threat to the elite. The expatriate participants urged that one listen more to the Iranians and ask which reforms are wanted.

### Session II: Iran's Civil Society & Political Opposition – Myth or Potential for Reforms?

The two speakers disagreed with one another on the use and purpose, or existence of civil society. One spoke of civil society and argued that it exists, is alive and well, and posed a number of questions about the role of religion in civil society. The other spoke at length about the role of modernism in civil society development. One argument against the existence of a civil society was that a fully functioning civil society must not just be cosmetic, but substantive. Civil society must have room for opposition and cannot work under a state that is ruled by a person or group that claims to have a divine right to rule. When divine rule exists, then there are no citizens only subjects. In contrast, some participants cited numerous civil society groups such as teachers' organizations, sports clubs, women's groups, and student groups. However, there is a risk that some NGOs in Iran have been founded either to attract western money or to be used as secret service outlets.

During the discussion, the participants argued about the usefulness and/or harm of the West using the space allowed within Iran to fund NGOs and the legitimacy of such involvement. Since the state monitors, regulates and infiltrates all NGOs, especially western ones, some said that the interests of the West have been harmed because of the regime's paranoia and suspicion and its doubt about the U.S. There were no conclusions agreed upon, but the existence of debate amongst experts and expatriates leads to the conclusion that the complications of working in Iran are great, but such involvement is still seen as helpful if done correctly and discreetly. On the other hand, if organizations are seen as being connected to the United States or motivated by 'regime change', then the reputation of such organizations suffers. The example provided to support this claim was the connection between Freedom House and the Dutch fund, 'Media Diversity in Iran.'



### **Session III: Human Rights & the Women's & Students' Movement**

Most of the discussion surrounded two basic ideas:

1. The benefits and drawbacks of approaching democracy in Iran from the minority rights standpoint, and
2. The role of women in society.

The issue of minority rights and human rights violations against minorities in Iran was also a cause of diverging opinions. All of the participants agreed that abuse of minorities in Iran needed to be addressed. Some participants thought these problems should be addressed along with a change to democracy while others urged pushing for a fully functioning Iranian democracy and dealing with human rights violations later. In other words, there is no point in arguing for the rights of minorities without arguing for the rights of the majority. The complex overlapping of various ethnicities in Iran and the country's history of diversity led some of the delegates to believe that a change to democracy would ensure the rights of minorities more than promoting violent or extreme movements amongst minorities themselves. All participants agreed that breaking apart the Iranian identity would do more damage than good.

The second part of the debate dealt with the role of women. Two of the female participants agreed that many misconceptions exist regarding the role of women's groups, and they both agreed that women's groups have always been at the heart of opposition, even if not on the frontlines of politics. On the other hand, some western media outlets and even western women misunderstand the cosmetic differences between these women's groups.

### **Session IV: Free Media & the Blogger Scene in Iran**

All participants agreed on the lack of a free media in Iran. However, the method by which to effect reform brought different opinions from the participants. There are two types of censorship in Iran. One is the censorship imposed by the government. The second type of censorship is self-censorship. Journalists and writers as well as political activists act out of their own fear and refuse to say certain things, or in order to write an opposing opinion, they choose to use general or generic wording so as not to directly insult someone in power. There was much discussion

regarding how 'free' journalists or writers are to disagree with various levels of government or the religious rulers. All of the participants agreed that there are many limitations to publishing material in Iran, but some argued that the establishment or religious leaders could be criticized in coded form. Additionally, the participants debated the objectivity of information emanating from the West. Some felt that media outlets, such as Radio Farda, are not objective while others felt that they are.

The second topic, the blogger scene in Iran, produced an informative discussion, even though it was not particularly contentious. There are over 700,000 blogs in Persian, however the most popular blogs and those that are critical of the ruling elite in Iran are either censored or filtered, perhaps even blocked. Though there are only four companies that provide blogging services in Iran, the use of blogging as a medium of communication is accepted. The Iranian government does not view the blogs themselves as that much of a threat, as they are no longer seen as something imported from the West.

### **Session V: 1979 (et seq.) – The Role of Clerics and Religion in Iran**

Religion plays two roles in Iran. One is to act as a stabilizing factor for the regime, and the second is to provide a mechanism for social outlets under the regime. The role of the religious elite as well as the evolution of politicized religion has led to a power structure in Iran that is particularly difficult for foreigners to understand. The radicalization of Islam became popular both by the use of media and due to social groups, such as charity organizations. The political-religious elites distribute material friendly to the regime through the religious groups and use phrases such as 'Islam is the solution' to gain political power from the masses. The marginalization of critical clerics by replacing them with 'regime-friendly' clerics has led to growing political-religious tension. Another consequence has been secularization of the youth, who see religion as a tool of the government. The conflicts that exist now are mostly between the truly religious and those who use religion for power and politics. The West needs to realize the distinction between the political and religious mullahs.

## Strategy Meeting Prague, June 12-14, 2007

### Session VI:

#### Iran: An Economic Profile between Oil and Sanctions

Iran's economy is mostly state owned and controlled, therefore producing an inefficient system. Bad economic policies and state-owned banks have created a system that cannot control inflation or unemployment. This problem was described as 'demographic suicide.' After the fall of the Shah, Iran experienced a baby boom, and that generation is now entering the job market. Over 750,000 people are added to the job market every year, which serves only to aggravate economic tension. Iranians are upset by Ahmadinejad's unfulfilled promises of economic reform. This discontent led to the implementation of energy subsidies in Iran. However, the overuse of energy subsidies to keep prices low has created a culture of waste, environmental problems, and a vicious cycle of inefficiency. In addition, dependence upon oil and gas in combination with the lack of investment in industry makes Iran weaker in the long run.

The participants debated the role of Germany, Italy, and France as Iran's leading trading partners. Another topic was the economic reform scenario by which Iran establishes an independent central bank and allows its currency to float. Many comparisons between the former Soviet economy and that of modern Iran were drawn in this conversation. The comparison between China's ongoing transformation and Iran was suggested as a future theme.

### Session VII:

#### Iran and its Arabian Neighbors – Rivalry and Competition

The lack of consensus in this conversation reflected the current international debate. Many discussions from earlier in the conference recurred, namely the question of legitimacy and the use of force against Iran to prevent nuclear development. A member of the German Bundestag advocated looking at the broader picture, citing the Gulf States' fear of Iran, and urging that the world make it unattractive for Iran to build nuclear weapons. The American representative stated that the world will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. The Iranian representatives posed questions about the lack of current diplomatic engagement from the European Union or its members. In the meantime, all parties agreed that Egypt and Saudi Arabia are now feeling pressure to get involved. The debate included discussion of the current and hypothetical future roles of Egypt and Saudi Arabia as well as the utility of sanctions against Iran. ■

### Executive Summary

The Aspen Institute series on Iran continued in Prague from June 12-14, 2007. The strategy meeting focused on gaining a full understanding of civil society in Iran, including influences from religious structures, political limitations, foreign influence, and internal motivations. Participants had a diverse array of backgrounds and expertise, and included one Tehran-based activist. The difficulties for potential participants in traveling outside of Iran are increasing.

In terms of structure, holding a joint session in connection with another conference held by People in Need and other Central European NGO's was interesting, but the outcomes of the joint sessions conducted with the People in Need conference were more academic in nature. The relevance of East European historical experience in relation to Iran remains to be seen. As a contrast, the smaller group sessions were much more intense. Since several of the participants were exiles from Iran, their experience in politics, business, and academia was extremely valuable, and their observations were welcomed by European political and academic participants.

The discussions regarding the role of civil society in Iran were very detailed, and the following summaries seek to extract the most important observations from the seven sessions.

### Session I:

#### Iran's Civil Society

The introductory session regarding the current state of Iranian civil society was detailed and thorough. The overarching discussion was two-pronged with much debate over the actual development or existence of civil society groups in Iran and also whether foreign aid is helpful. Regarding the former, most participants agreed that the use of oil income by the state has allowed it to disregard its responsibility to its citizens. Because of this lack of interest, and the current financial crisis, the Iranian system is teetering, and its leaders fear their own population. Indeed civil society is seen as competing with the government rather than supporting the entire system of government. Evidence of this is seen in the recent arrests and clampdowns on civil society. The hierarchy of arrests illuminates the priorities of the state. For example, the government seems to be more lenient on teachers (who strike) than on students and more lenient on bus drivers than on women's

groups. The rationale for these choices is reflective of the regime's anxieties, namely that many of these 'non-political' groups are being funded by western governments or organizations. This type of support from the West, regardless of actual intentions, is seen as a threat by Iranian power elites.

Because of this stigma, civil society groups are wary of accepting western and U.S. money. Most of the participants agreed that future leaders of an Iranian government would need both respect and legitimacy in the eyes of the Iranian population, which makes accepting western funds problematic. Due to the anxieties of the Iranian government and the negative reputation of U.S. democratization efforts, many potential civil society organizations cannot accept foreign funds or will not even apply for various development projects. Even the use of European funds, such as the Dutch Fund for Media Diversity, can cause problems. Despite the desperate need for capacity building, the danger connected with accepting western money is very high. Traditional regime supporters – mainly unions or workers interest groups – have mounted many significant actions or protests in Iran. Western money is neither wanted nor necessarily relevant for such organizations.

Additional questions were also posed regarding the utility of western money and support. One participant suggested that the 'double-bind' of the United States makes it difficult for that nation to do anything. They are criticized when they try to support civil society at the ground level but are also criticized when they do nothing. In regards to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's proposal to allocate \$75 million for democracy promotion, some of the participants agreed that this money was a way for the United States to spend more money on itself. On the other hand, the allocation of funds is significant since it proves that the United States is willing to spend large sums to accomplish its stated foreign policy goals. The second element of foreign support can simply entail foreign recognition. International awards, statements from worldwide organizations, press coverage, and general interest are elements of support from the West that should be encouraged. The option of taking military action remains. One participant asked about the utility of taking military action against Iranian targets outside Iranian borders in order to encourage civil society. The conclusion was that the reaction of Iranians, at this point, is unpredictable. Given the realities of living under constant pressure from the Iranian government and of genuine fear of foreign attack, reactions on the streets of Iran are almost impossible to foresee.

Finally, the participants generally agreed that the women's movement was most hopeful and still active within the country. Despite setbacks and arrests, women's activists are being careful, regrouping, and taking small steps. The student movement is at a standstill, and the unions' demonstrations are mainly a signal of economic hardship. One participant vividly detailed the challenges of working in Iran by describing the problems of youth migration. This 'brain drain' from Iran is becoming more of a problem as many young students and professionals are unable to find fulfilling academic positions or employment.

#### **Sessions II, III, IV: The Relevancy of the Central European Experience**

The joint session with the People in Need conference entitled 'Reforming Repressive State Apparatus: The Central European Experience' focused on democratic transitional lessons from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Reports were given on the reform of intelligence services, interior ministries, police, archives, and the army. Many of the reports did not hold too much relevance for the Iranian participants; however they were given a chance to make a few statements during the second session as well as to take advantage of opportunities to make useful contacts. One point related to the religious culture in countries such as Iran. Operating under a theocracy differs from the East European experience where the church often provided protection for opposition groups.

#### **Session V & VI: Religious Groups and Iran's Civil Society**

After a very detailed report on the religious structure and power plays between the various Ayatollahs (individually and ideologically), the discussion regarding the relation of civil society to religion focused primarily on the influence of religious education and the various religiously-based, non-governmental political groups.

The most important changes that have taken place in the religious education system are in curriculum and structure. The curriculum of the *hawzah*, or seminary, is now partially secular, allowing the study of languages, classical philosophy, international studies, and sociology. Some of these schools have very modern libraries with fully-stocked collections. Women are allowed to study. On the other

hand, the courses are pre-approved by the office of the leader and the scholarship and stipend process is increasingly handled by politically connected Ayatollahs. Some argue that reformist Ayatollahs are active in these schools, but the type of reform and the extent to which they can work is limited. Even the most reformist clerics have a vested interest in the current system, which makes them less likely to be truly reformist in ideals and leads them to try to reform within the parameters of the current social structure. Indeed, most clerics are not socially reformist. In addition, security agents are often placed in classes.

True openings in the social system are found in many workers' organizations. Due to economic hardship, many regime-appointed union leaders now find themselves organizing protests for economic reform. While these kinds of demonstrations do not oppose the foundations of the system or the religion, they are significant in that the regime has less control. The discussion of the relationship between the religion and civil society identified six centers of civic action in Iran.

1. Law Centers
2. Teachers' Unions
3. Bus Drivers' Unions
4. Women's Organizations
5. Journalists
6. Students' Islamic Unions

Forms of passive resistance, which include music, clothing, and migration were also discussed. Three major non-governmental, but politically, important groups reportedly include:

1. The *Hojjatieh* group, which now maintains open ties with the Islamic Coalition Party of Iran
2. The *Mo'talefeh* association (Islamic Coalition Party), which sympathizes with *Fedayeen Islam* - a known terrorist group
3. *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, dubbed the Islamic Republic of Iran's 'storm troopers'

The discussion concluded by examining the prospects for secular openings in Iran versus political openings. While some clerics can be considered reformists, the variations between reformist ideologies are legion. Due to the integration of the Ayatollahs into politics, the prospects for political opening seem more likely than those for social change. One idea still on the table is to connect civil society groups and reformist clerics. However, due to the theocratic nature of the country, predicting the degree to which either will be open to this and when is difficult.

## Session VII: Iranian-Russian Relations

Many Iranians, according to participants, do not trust the Russians nor do they see Russia as a dependable partner. The power struggle between the two countries makes it difficult for many Iranians view Russia as a possible partner in civil society development in Iran. If popular opinions of Russia are negative on an international plane, the diplomatic gains between Russia and the West will not translate into influence over Iran.

There are similarities between the countries of the former Soviet Union and Iran in as much as the international community needs to play a continuing role in the "great game", while balancing the difficulties of operating inside Iran. In Iran's closed society, outsiders can act as microphone. However, the problem of finding a 'legitimate' outside voice still persists.

Finally, the statements made regarding the nuclear issue in Iran and its ties to Russia were also insightful. Many oppositionists and civil society activists in Iran, although they distrust Russia, view the international attention that is paid to the nuclear issue as a microphone for other issues. They have a platform as long as the world concentrates on Iran's nuclear capacities. ■



## Iran Practitioners' Workshop & Roundtable Berlin, September 12-14, 2007

### Executive Summary

This three-day practitioners' workshop and roundtable focused on the activities of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Iran. The meeting began with a group of practitioners discussing the purposes, motivations, and goals behind the operation of civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs within the country. On the third day, a broader group of journalists, academics, other CSO/NGO representatives, and members of the wider Iranian-German community deliberated on themes of interest in Iran. Organizations were chosen based on their level of expertise and activism. In five separate sessions a total of twenty-two participants, seventy percent of Iranian origin, discussed constraints on accepting western money, networking processes, political restrictions, and the activities of CSOs/NGOs in the region.

The discussions centered on the legitimacy and credibility challenges faced in trying to build networks of CSOs and NGOs in Iran. While participants agreed that credibility was vital, there was little agreement on how to develop or improve in this area. Credibility improves when organizations pursue cultural or humanitarian versus political goals. It also improves when funding comes from non-governmental sources as part of a continuous, cooperative process characterized by attempts to show understanding of the complex set of social actors found in Iran. There is, on the other hand, a legitimate need for political advocacy for basic human rights and freedoms in Iran and a need for support of the families of victims of abuses in these areas. A number of participants characterized a credible and legitimate civil society as one that is free to accept funding from any source and one that is bereft of heavy-handed government interference. They said that it was important to legitimize acceptance of foreign government funding in Iran rather than accede to government restrictions. Participants highlighted the tension between organizations' desire to be open and transparent in their activities in Iran and the need to protect activists in Iran against possible reprisals. The practitioners called for more effective engagement by the Iranian Diaspora – viewing it as a very important potential connector and legitimizer of foreign and domestic activity in Iran.

The task of engaging and empowering Iranian civil society will remain difficult as long as Iran remains a closed society. Practitioners emphasized the need for patience and an attitude of respect towards Iranian counterparts. Given the post World War II history of Iran, Iranians were said to be acutely sensitive to any hints of patronizing behavior or paternalism on the part of representatives of western coun-

tries – official or non-official. Once this barrier and chronic Iranian tendencies towards secrecy and conspiracy theories are overcome, the most fruitful opportunities for network building were said to lie in the areas of new media aided by the connections of the Iranian Diaspora. The practitioners emphasized the need to engage Iranian society at all levels, but also highlighted the potentially critical role that the Iranian middle class can play in view of the economic strictures that the country is currently experiencing. The participants suggested a two-track strategy focusing on building both internal and external networks dealing with Iran. They also suggested adopting an "indirect approach" in which non-political cultural activities serve as a bridge by which to establish contacts, which might later result in discussion of more substantive political topics.

### Practitioners' Workshop Purpose

The two-day workshop concentrated on the challenges of networking, funding, and programming in Iran, and brought together seven practitioners from European NGOs and organizations working on Iran. Four of the seven practitioners were of Iranian origin, which gave the workshop greater credibility and depth.

### Session I: Short Introduction of Practitioners and Projects

Each representative described their organization's purpose and activities. Organizational expertise included emerging media, politics, human rights, women's rights, and cultural exchange. The goals of each organization were equally diverse. The discussion initially focused on legitimacy. Participants suggested that all organizations and individuals should ask themselves not only what their projects involve, but also why they are being undertaken. Convictions and respect emerged as fundamental motivating factors for many practitioners; many said that politics should not be the prime motivating factor under current circumstances. The activists also advocated practicing cultural respect while continuing to work for human rights and a free civil society.

The discussion moved on to the general philosophy of an open society characterized by the absence of heavy-handed government intervention. One participant mentioned, for

example, that western organizations' freedom to receive money from the state and concomitant ability to remain free from government policy interference testifies to the stability both of that society and of the given government. Iranian civil society seems weak by comparison. Some participants insisted that, even though these systemic weaknesses are limiting, foreign NGO activism should come only at request of Iranian civil society. All seven participants agreed that activists within Iran had better insight into Iranian needs. Personality, individual connections, patience, and cultural respect are four fundamental qualities needed for sustainable CSO/NGO activity in Iran.

Another challenge mentioned was termed the 'human agency factor.' Since networks are dependent upon individual recommendations, the difficulty of building networks in Iran is monumental. The secrecy factor and Iranian tendencies toward conspiracy theories are even further complicated by opportunism.

## **Session II: Discovering Practical Ties with Iran's Civil Society**

This session focused on the constraints Westerners experience in working with Iranian civil society. The participants discussed how to create workspaces by using the networking openings provided in the fields of new media and technology. The discussion also touched on the challenges of working with the Iranian Diaspora. The practitioners made three basic recommendations for NGO activity in Iran: (i) establish clear goals, (ii) keep expectations realistic and culturally sound, and (iii) be patient.

The representatives identified many limitations on working with and in Iran. The first is the need for security. As many organizations try to maintain transparency, a paradox is created when working in Iran. The political situation is uneasy and dangerous for many activists, and a fear of being discredited deters some organizations from working more actively within the country. They also hesitate to accept government funds. The potential for arrest of activists and the limitations imposed by the parlous economic situation are equally serious. Some groups use pseudonyms or try to protect their Iranian network by operating in secrecy. This can exacerbate an NGO/CSO culture already laden with conspiracy theories, and the value of operating in this manner was questioned. The participants were torn between the agreed need to be credible and transparent versus the need to protect Iranians from their own government.

A second important set of topics, discussed at length, was the use of blogging, new media, and journalism. The problems associated with working in Iran are similar to those faced in most other closed societies. Strong nationalistic feelings, limited freedom for civil society, and a climate of conspiracy and fear impede progress between western and Iranian journalists. This creates 'zones,' or cliques, many of which self-select out of the process of international networking. According to the practitioners, the problems lie not only in the internal situation in Iran, but also in the approach of western journalists. While intentions are usually benign, the frequent use of terms such as 'training' or 'teaching' Middle Eastern journalists to apply international standards can be insulting for activists and journalists in Iran. The practitioners emphasized the need to use terms such as "cooperation" rather than "teaching" in order to demonstrate respect towards Iranians, thereby creating a better relationship between Iranian and western organizations and journalists. In the experience of some participants, this credibility is best gained via slow, cautious collaboration.

A third problem identified involves the challenge presented by the Iranian Diaspora. The Iranian exile community has vast potential, both for international networking and for fostering mutual understanding. The Diaspora was termed the connector by one participant. For some Iranians living in the West, this means the opportunity to inspire a younger generation. For others, this means acting as a mediator or perhaps translator for those living in Iran. Many participants felt that the reasons underlying this community's ineffectiveness need further discussion and development.

Many western organizations still express confusion or even exhaustion with the complexities of international cooperation under the current Iranian government. Participants agreed that Iran as a society is extremely pluralistic, bordering on factional. Some participants said that the best opportunities to establish contacts in Iran are found in non-political entities and programs. Existing organizations are largely not interested in causing governmental change; rather they represent universal goals such as human rights, freedom of speech, and women's rights. However, due to the diversity in Iran and the mutually hostile, almost paranoid factions within the country, these universal concepts are very difficult to promote.

### **Session III: Foreign Funding – Challenges and Perspectives**

After agreeing on fundamentals, such as human rights, the participants disagreed on the question of financing. All seven practitioners agreed that sources of financing are key to establishing credibility; however they were divided on the implications. Two ideas emerged. First, accepting money from government sources seriously damages organizational credibility amongst the Iranian population and endangers Iranian activists; therefore organizations should openly state that no western governmental money should be given to Iranians. The goal of this approach is to eliminate secrecy and conspiracy theories before they begin, especially with regards to money originating in the United States. Confusion arises when organizations accept government funds, but do not give these funds to Iranians inside Iran. Many organizations feel that this second approach is the best way to eliminate risks for in-country activists. While the goal to protect activists in the country is noble and necessary, the margin for error under this approach is quite large.

In contrast, the second approach states that CSOs/NGOs, regardless of the origin of their funds, are not extended arms of government. They operate under their own mission statements and governance. Therefore, organizations should not impose limits on themselves, accept some state funds if needed, and dispel the Iranian conspiracy theories connected with such financing. Many participants stressed that appeasing the Iranian government by refusing foreign funding was not the answer, particularly when it comes to accepting funds for projects. However, the sensitivity of the current political situation causes activists to consider the implications carefully before accepting funds from international sources. It is important to eliminate the myth that CSOs/NGOs are actually well-hidden governmental bodies by prevailing in the struggle to gain acceptance for foreign government funding. Due to the fact that accepting such funding currently has negative impacts on organizations' safety and credibility, the situation in Iran is not flexible. Donor organizations must still protect Iranians from the potential negative consequences of accepting foreign funds.

The debate came down to a question of transparency. One participant mentioned that a paradox exists for all organizations wanting to be involved in Iran, which is that western NGOs strive for transparency in a non-transparent country. This problem is coupled with a seemingly unpredictable government. Many organizations want to offer

assistance for programs that Iranians are interested in but pointed out that they are constantly confronted by the Iranian government's shifting 'red lines.' Several women's organizations, for example, were shut down in March because they accepted funding from Europe. Organizations must ask themselves not only "does the project add value?" but also "does the project cause problems for Iranian recipients?"

While the practitioners stressed that the western tendency simply to dole out money is wrong, there is also a legitimate need to provide support. For example, families of political prisoners are in tight situations, and the worsening economy affects everyone, except the most privileged upper echelons. However, the West's desire to help families or to work for human rights or women's rights is often met with skepticism and doubt in Iran. The practitioners agreed that each funding opportunity must be carefully weighed against the potential consequences on a case-by-case basis.

### **Extended Audience Sessions Purpose**

After two days of intense discussions among practitioners regarding activism in Iran, the conference expanded to include a wider audience consisting of journalists, academics, other NGO representatives, and members of the wider Iranian-German community. The purpose was to discuss challenges facing all organizations interested in Iran. The two main topics that were discussed were the behavior of the Iranian government towards NGO/CSOs and how Iranian citizens are affected by the current economic situation.

### **Session IV: Action & Reaction – Past and Present Regime Behavior**

The session began with agreement that activity in Iran is constrained, and the view from outside is that life in Iran seems to be constantly deteriorating. The economic situation appears unstable and the political situation almost irrational. Regardless of different propensities for activism among the participants, there was a clear call for creative, apolitical, and patient engagement with differing levels of Iranian civil society.

While the group basically agreed that the political situation is difficult, lack of understanding of government behavior

was also said to create a distorted perspective from the West. Internal dynamics and the difficult political environment suggest that a more managed form of civil society exists in Iran. Basing themselves on their cultural knowledge of Iran and on a close examination of the current political situation, participants reiterated a theme mentioned during the practitioners' workshop: change should only come from within. Several participants also noted the need to focus on opportunities for young people within Iran. The theme of political and organizational credibility permeated the discussion once again. While it was a source of debate, participants agreed that the Iranian Diaspora needs to re-energize its efforts to improve the credibility of western NGOs' networking activities in Iran.

The reaction of the Iranian government, of course, is the real challenge for all involved. Some participants spoke of success in their endeavors, especially regarding non-political exchanges and projects. Other participants spoke of the difficulty stemming from Iran's lack of infrastructure and Iranian hesitation in expanding cultural exchanges. These deficits were termed the battlefield of perceptions. The uncertainty of the political situation causes anxiety on both sides and – as was pointed out several times during the day – individuals or groups operate differently when fear is the prevailing motivator.

#### **Session V: Economy and Democracy Promotion – Help or Hindrance?**

Economic data on Iran are unreliable. Based on reports and discussions during the conference, the participants concluded that the signs of social dissatisfaction that have in the past sparked transitions to more democratic regimes of governance elsewhere do exist in Iran. However, the details of the Iranian political situation make the probability of such change in the near future unpredictable. There was broad consensus that inflation in Iran is significant – lying somewhere between 10-15%. The rise in the price of basic goods is having an impact on the average citizen in Iran. Prices for housing are rising rapidly. Gasoline rationing is affecting many small businesses and commuters and is creating a black market. The implications of this deteriorating situation were debated.

Some participants claimed that President Ahmadinejad remains popular despite the country's economic troubles; others strongly disagreed. These differences of opinion were at the root of disagreement on the potential for change

in Iran motivated by social dissatisfaction. The argument that no broad base for social change exists was said to depend on Iran remaining a closed society. Despite continuing international attention to nuclear discussions, much of the world is uninterested in the economic plight of everyday Iranians. Additionally, the Revolutionary Guards successfully quell strikes and reporting on strikes, not withstanding the frequency of industrial action in Iran. Many human rights activists, however, do believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran is susceptible to outside pressure. International public debate, regarding human rights violations in Iran has prevented some executions from taking place and has caused judgment on others to be deferred. There are, therefore, some hopeful signs.

In the end, most of the participants agreed that: (i) Iran views the security of its own citizens versus the security of the rest of the world as a zero sum game and will act accordingly; (ii) the economic elite, the clergy, and the government are communities that are strongly inter-connected easily misunderstood and willing to protect the current power structures and (iii) the economic situation of the middle and lower class is critical in the current situation with there being little clarity on means by which the government can improve it. ■



## Iran Strategy Meeting on Digital Security London, September 26-28, 2007

### Executive Summary

Digital security applies new technology to an old concept. Whether securing digital data or physical space, the end goal is to ensure safety and protection from abuse. This Aspen roundtable focused on digital security in Iran, and the participants included non-governmental organization (NGO) and civil society organization (CSO) representatives with technology expertise as well as a number of activists. The one-day discussion was divided into four sessions in which the thirteen participants debated the social, economic, and technological factors associated with digital security in Iran.

Farsi is one of the top ten blogging languages in the world, and Iran occupies twenty-seventh place worldwide in the number of Internet users. With a rapidly developing information technology infrastructure and e-government services, the relatively large digital space in Iran is unique, compared to most other closed political systems where censorship is much stronger.

Starting in 2001, ease of access and anonymity caused weblogs by both women and men on political and sensitive social topics to flourish in Iran. An Iranian government crackdown followed in 2003 with ten million web pages being blocked, Iran has since risen to fifteenth place among governmental suppressors of the Internet, but Iranian government Internet censorship is still under-developed, spotty and relatively uncoordinated. Determined users can outmaneuver it relatively easily, if they want to, and viable strategies – both personal and technological – exist to maintain or improve existing levels of Internet access.

The biggest challenge for Iranian civil society activists in implementing tighter Internet security practices is the human factor. A number of organizations that can help do exist, but security is above all a behavioral issue, requiring significant investments of both time and money to correct and/or implement. Implementing tighter security risks attracting unwanted attention, presents a tradeoff with an organization's transparency goals, and distracts organizations from their main mission. Implementing tighter security could also create even greater levels of factionalism within Iranian civil society than already exist.

Iranian civil society activists and citizens appear to be complacent and willing to accept existing levels of Internet censorship in Iran, as long as these do not become more intense.

### Session I: The Digital Revolution in Iran

Farsi is one of the top ten blogging languages in the world, with an estimated 200,000 recorded blogs. Iran is ranked twenty-seventh globally in the total number of Internet users. With approximately ten percent of the population already using the Internet, and the number rising, the government has an interest in maintaining and even improving the digital welfare of its citizens. Those who need help buying laptops and personal computers (PCs) can obtain loans, and Iran has invested seriously in e-governance services. With around one hundred Internet service providers (ISPs) and a growing infrastructure, Iran is listed amongst the digitally developed countries. However, even though many people have access to the Internet in Iran, fees for Internet usage are relatively high. One participant reported that the charges are normally around 2500 Rials (0.19 Euro cents) per hour. Internet access is mostly obtained via dial-up connections and is very slow due to Internet speed restrictions imposed by the government. The question among the participants of this session was, "How is Iran unique in a developed and digitalized world?"

The answer boiled down to the matter of the Iranian operating paradigm. Digital development in itself is not unusual; however Iran is noteworthy due to its current sensitive political environment. As in other digitally developed countries, the online space in Iran is used for communication and networking, be it for business, political, or social purposes. Iran is a closed system, both socially and politically. Existing limitations on communication pushed many Iranians into adopting a new, digital forms of communication after the Internet was introduced in Iran in 1996. Easy availability and anonymity provided an outlet through which many people began to express themselves openly, primarily through blogging. The popularity of blogging along with the politicization of blogging led eventually to a crackdown on online activities. Among the 200,000 recorded blogs in Farsi, only 6,000 (3%) are currently active\* – meaning sites that have been updated in the past ninety days. Limitations on and censorship of the Internet in Iran do not preclude use of this digital space, but the restrictions have increased the level of apathy among ordinary Iranians, leaving them asking, "Why bother?"

Regardless of these constraints, the Farsi blogging explosion has caused others to turn their heads. According to the participants, the anonymity and availability of blogging originally attracted political commentary, especially in a country where political discussion has many boundaries. Blogs were not only political, but also personal. Bloggers,

\* Definitions of "active" vary.

both women and men, often continue to share life stories, experiences, and thoughts they would never voice in public, mainly by using pseudonyms. In a society where individualism is not a cultural norm, blogging provided a platform for individuals to post their opinions but still fit in culturally. However, the government has progressively restricted the freedom available on the Internet. Cultural discussions rather than political ones now characterize many blogs, and many have simply limited their activity or stopped posting.

Some hopeful openings still exist. Many of the Internet Service Providers are ill equipped or slow to implement censorship requirements, leaving room for Iranians to access a less censored version of the web via less stringent ISPs. One participant stated that if an Iranian wants to access a specific page on the web, it is possible to outmaneuver filtration. Another participant mentioned that proxies and encoding can help individuals protect data and privacy. The relatively large existing digital space is unique to Iran, compared with most closed systems where censorship is much stronger. However, social networking on the Internet in Iran has become more factionalized than integrated.

## **Session II: State Control and Censorship in the 21st Century**

Though the Iranian government is not the most extreme censor of the Internet in the world, the country is still named as one of the top fifteen suppressors of the Internet by Reporters without Borders. The country has detained and even tortured bloggers. Iran is breaking its own freedom of speech laws by filtering and blocking websites, and there has been an accelerated crackdown on Internet freedoms under the current president. It is estimated that over ten million web pages are filtered or blocked from viewing in Iran. Other restrictions include a ban on broadband or high-speed Internet in private residences and a prohibition on the use of proxies and encryption.

There are, however, a number of positive elements that make Iran unique. Iran has a very large Internet-user population in relation to other closed societies, and the accessible Internet space is rather large. For the 10 million websites that are filtered or blocked, there are millions more that can be accessed. The population in Iran is young, educated, and computer literate; solid online communities already exist and are thriving because of these facts. As mentioned above, the expanding infrastructure affords increased levels of access throughout the country, and the

government's provision of e-governance services will only help accelerate this phenomenon. Nevertheless, censorship continues to be a problem for the NGO/CSO community in Iran. Technological advances leading to digital freedom, followed by censorship crackdowns is a cat and mouse game that activists must constantly engage in.

Censorship is divided into two tiers: central level censorship by the government and Internet Service Provider censorship, centrally directed by the government. The first tier is characterized by one central telecommunications company that controls all access ports to the Internet. Iran is known to have a couple of hundred ports, or gates to the Internet. By way of comparison, China only has four. By controlling access in this way, the central government can limit the amount of information and type of information available within Iran by filtering websites – mostly those in the English and German languages.

The participants indicated that most Farsi web page filtering is done at the second tier, ISP level. There are over one hundred ISPs in Iran. Some of them are quite unsophisticated and their filtration of Farsi is less than predictable. Although weekly efforts to block forbidden words are undertaken at the ISP level, not all ISPs comply. Even when the ISPs have sufficient capacity to constantly monitor and prevent certain web searches, doing so slows access speed and eats bandwidth. Customers complain when the Internet is too slow or stops working. ISPs may therefore be slightly disinclined to regulate their customers as strictly as the central government might wish. Communication between the Iranian central telecommunications company and ISPs seems to be substandard with occasional lists of forbidden words reportedly being sent to ISPs by post.

Despite these inconsistencies, content filtration seems to be the censorship method of choice in Iran. Words associated with the following topics are filtered: pornography, women's issues, politics, religion, human rights, homosexuality, satire, and miscellaneous items such as proxies, encrypters, or blogging tools. These categories start to explain some of the government's behavior. It tries to block websites that it fears might cause social unrest or threaten the current Islamic Republic. Some of the filtration software originates with U.S. companies, namely software called SmartFilter; however the participants mostly insisted that the origin of the software is not the primary concern. The implications of its use are most important for those inside Iran. For western NGOs, the point of discussion should be the role of government in legalizing spy software, the consequences thereof, and controls on production and export of such potentially dangerous technology.

Knowledge of censorship in Iran is widespread, and web-censorship is only one piece of the puzzle. Media – television and print alike – are subject to control, rather than just filtration. Many Iranians, therefore, trust the information they receive on the web more than they trust traditional press or news media outlets. Since this space already exists on the Internet, the government may find it difficult to take it away. Strategies to gain more access to Iranians using this existing Internet space can be divided into technological and personal strategies. Technological strategies include improving security, installing proxies, or circumventing existing Internet ports by using satellites. Personal strategies include citizen protests when access is limited or interdicted, use of languages other than English or German to avoid filtration, and establishing controlled access to secure, trusted, personal networks. Most Iranians do not receive their information from the Internet. Those who do are young and educated but afraid of breaking with the status quo. Iranians view Internet censorship as tolerable as long as it does not get worse.

### **Session III: Digital Security and Privacy for Civil Society Activists**

The concept of security is not new, but the application of digital security requires behavior adaptation as well as technological knowledge. Whether for an individual or for an organization secure data and communication means more than e-mail encryption and using phone cards. It begins with the knowledge that nothing is one hundred percent secure and continues with training on three levels: Communication, Censorship Circumvention/Anonymity, and Backup Tools.

Communication security tools are heavily dependent upon localization. Language barriers, compatibility, user-knowledge, and sustainability contribute to security, and all of these challenges must be overcome with training. Several NGO/CSOs exist to assist in technology training, but the problems associated with localization affect the people as well as the technology. The example of a young, foreign university student trying to teach a women's organization to use email encryption software illustrates the disconnects, both in generational knowledge and in language. In fact, digital security is the easier challenge because computers will faithfully execute the commands that they are given. The difficulty lies in overcoming the human factor. The implications of using security technology are significant, and

the use of security measures raises questions regarding the value of transparency versus the need for security. Again, the women's movement provides a helpful example. Wouldn't a women's group interested in cultural events and education cause suspicion if it started using e-mail encryption? This also raises questions about training people with general technological knowledge to adapt to new technological tools. Such tools require a significant investment and sustained training by skilled activists.

Censorship is best avoided by circumvention, but such maneuvers most often result in more censorship. The game played between the two uses of technology turns into a vicious circle, termed the technological arms race. Most NGOs, in any country, are not equipped to compete in this race, nor is competing in the race their primary mission. Rather, most groups need simple technology and the skills to use it. Technology becomes outdated as new programs are developed. Problems are also created when tighter security is implemented or censorship is circumvented. When one group or individual implements tighter digital security, so do other groups or individuals. This eventually leads to the isolation of some groups, which exacerbates existing factionalism in today's Iran. Security measures used by individuals can also be replicated on a mass basis, further accelerating the technological arms race.

Backup tools are simply the tools used to secure work, data, and systems. The tools can prevent loss of information through software or equipment failure and are part of general digital security. One participant emphasized that security cannot be viewed as a commodity, but must, rather, be seen as a behavioral pattern. Digital security is a part of information security. For NGOs/CSOs in Iran, such security is necessary to operate – especially for organizations advocating social justice. The backup tools for CSOs/NGOs can include everything from hardware, software, databases, and communication media to the network of people they work with. Backup tools are not limited to technology and are only as strong as the network of people using those tools. The successful implementation of such tools and those discussed above is dependent upon consistent, sustained adherence to standard operating procedures. One participant stated that in order to increase one's digital security, choose one method and stick with it. Frequent strategy changes lead to mistakes.

## Digital Media and Journalism in Iran Berlin, December 12-14, 2007

### Session IV: Future Perspectives for Iran's Digital Reality

Iran's digital infrastructure is expanding but freedom of Internet access is not expanding along with it. While the legitimacy of censorship is debatable, the lack of freedom and the practice of espionage upon civilians in Iran – sometimes leading to imprisonment – is a notable abuse of new technologies. Iran's young population is quick to adopt new technologies, but limits on access, on high-speed access, and on the external Internet are constraining. The red lines in Iran are still largely unknown among the users of the Internet, especially among bloggers.

Other factors contributing to Iran's digital future include economic strains, foreign policy, infrastructure, and corruption. Some participants believe that these factors are, at the moment, creating a complacent society, where the maintenance of the status quo is preferred. Iranian participants strongly emphasized that the end of complacency would come only at Iranian instigation. On the other hand, Westerners can provide tools and training for the improvement of digital education and security in Iran, whether for NGO/CSO activists or for basic individual needs – such as securing banking information.

The difficulties for most western NGOs lie in determining which groups in Iran are compatible cooperation partners. Many western participants expressed the desire to understand and amplify the voices of Iranian civil society; however the pluralistic but closed nature of Iranian society complicates outsiders' efforts. It is difficult to understand who the players are, what roles they have, and how to work within this system. Several western participants posed these questions, but did not receive specific answers. Some suggestions were made regarding groups in Iran that are, as yet, under-utilized, such as: women's organizations, minorities, teacher's unions, students, lawyers, and environmental groups. Groups that have not yet established an international digital presence are the underground music scene and children's rights movement. ■

### Executive Summary

New media is the latest battleground in the struggle for freedom of expression in Iran. In recent years, thousands of independent, Iranian-run web sites have sprung up in and outside of Iran. Farsi has become the ninth most-used language in the blogosphere. But supporters of the regime have Internet tactics of their own: censors block sites critical of the regime, official newspapers create attractive, image-rich home pages, and conservative bloggers occupy a substantial share of Iran's crowded bandwidth. The Internet connects Iranians with one another and with the outside world, but the more specific dimensions of its impact on Iranian politics, culture, and society are poorly understood.

How do new technologies shape the challenges facing independent journalists and international activists seeking to promote more open public discourse in Iran? This was the central question addressed at 'Digital Media and Journalism in Iran,' a two-day conference held from December 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> at the Aspen Institute in Berlin. The event featured six panels and fifteen journalists, bloggers, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from Europe, the United States, and Iran. While many participants were optimistic about the democratizing effect of new modes of expression on the country's incipient civil society, they also acknowledged considerable hurdles. These include obvious issues – outmaneuvering the censors – but also more serious concerns such as coordinating the efforts of well-meaning western activists with the interests and safety of journalists living under the regime.

### Session I: The Fundamentals of Free Expression

The first session focused on the idea of free speech in international law and Iranian society. Like the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, the Iranian Constitution includes the right to freedom of expression. As recently as the late 1990s, reformist newspapers played a prominent role in public life, providing a backbone of support for former President Mohammad Khatami's liberalizing agenda.

The year 2000 marked a turning point. Alarmed by reformist gains in national elections, Iran's clerical leadership (*Velayat-e Faqih*) initiated a massive crackdown, closing six newspapers, arresting editors, and hauling reporters before what came to be known as the Press Court.



Internet sites were also targeted. Today, of Iranian's roughly 200,000 home grown blogs, only 6,000 are active\* (that is, updated within the last 90 days), and the majority of these avoid discussion of political topics.

But even while politics is taboo, new media are driving important cultural changes. Participants emphasized that blogs, by creating a platform for self-expression, aid in the development of individual and group identities – crucial building blocks in the development of liberal political consciousness. Moreover, the anonymity of the Internet creates a world where believers and secularists, men and women, are, theoretically at least, on an equal footing. Though Internet access can be slow and expensive, circumventing state filters is not impossible – apparently, some Internet Service Providers (ISPs) simply charge a small fee for censorship-free access.

Despite these positive developments, the effects of new media are likely to be felt only over time – through gradually evolving attitudes rather than direct political change. One participant even suggested that the government allows blogs to operate as a kind of 'safety valve,' releasing the pressure created by a small group of dissenters before it can boil over into a general uprising. Whether this is truly the regime's strategy or not, the fact remains that new media provide a much-needed public space – more protected from censorship than traditional media – in which Iranians can practice the skills of civil debate and rational engagement on which functional democracies are built.

Throughout the session, participants returned to the critical role of Islam in debates over free speech. To outsiders, religion can appear to be nothing but an obstacle to reform. The *Velayat-e Faqih* outlaws dissenting voices as "un-Islamic." But to be effective in the long run, activists will need to learn to root their claims in the principles of *sharī'ah* (Islamic law), or risk discrediting themselves. This is true regarding not only the right of free expression but human rights more generally: reform requires a process of *ijtihad*, or revision of ossified interpretations of Islamic law to fit evolving realities. As one participant noted, the fate of free speech will be decided "in the context of a theological and legal discourse." The more effectively reformers can debate conservatives on religious terms, the stronger will be their credibility in Iranian society at large.

## Session II: The Environment for Iranian Journalists

From the place of free speech in Islam, the discussion turned to a more concrete matter: What is it like being a journalist in Iran? For those who question or criticize the regime, the risks are considerable. Even when their writing is not censored outright, independent-minded journalists are persistently hassled and intimidated by the government. When reporters cross the line, arrests and torture are not uncommon. Journalists must constantly adapt to the sensitivities of the regime; they lack job security and must submit their writing to careful self-censorship. As one participant remarked, "Journalists in the free world sit down and ask: 'What shall I write about today?' Whereas Iranian journalists have to ask: 'what shouldn't I write about today?'"

The problem is not just repression per se. Participants noted that, among loyalists and independents alike, there is little sense of a professional commitment to objective reporting. Media outlets tend to fall into three categories: 'activists' (mostly exiles, commenting on Iran from the outside), 'reformers' (liberal minded journalists inside of Iran pushing for reform), and 'scribes' (state-supported mouthpieces of the regime). Journalism, in other words, tends to be an extension of politics by other means.

Accurate reporting on sensitive topics, averred one participant, has to take place in a 'secret language' of indirection and insinuation. Sometimes, these restrictions give birth to creative and nuanced commentary, but they also mean that Iranian journalists remain unpracticed in the basic skills of sound journalism – checking sources and facts, providing both sides of a story, separating fact from opinion. The popularity of blogs – where rumors and opinion flow freely and subjectivity is celebrated – does not augur well for the development of professional journalistic standards, even among the regime's critics.

## Session III: The Contributions and Added Value of Iranian Bloggers

Session III took up the question of blogs in depth, focusing on their positive and negative effects on Iranian civil society. Many of the former have already been noted: blogs provide new forums for self-expression, gathering points for marginalized groups, and alternative sources for news and first-hand, unfiltered information. In a country where,

\* Definitions of "active" vary.

according to one participant, the Internet is regarded as more trustworthy than newspapers, television, and radio (this based on a 2004 Islamic Society of North America poll, no longer available online, but reported in the blogosphere), the potential for blogs to have a vital impact on public opinion should not be underestimated.

On the other hand, not all bloggers are progressives. Hard-line and fundamentalist blogs are common; colleges in the religious capital of Qom recently started to offer blogger training courses. While conservative commentators are by no means a monolithic group – heated debates frequently flare up, for instance, over whether or not Hamas is justified in using terror tactics – they make little effort to engage with the more independent and reform-minded groups. Numerous participants pointed to a recent study by John Kelly (Columbia University), who identified four ‘clusters’ or communities in the Farsi blogosphere – a liberal cluster, a conservative cluster, a ‘poetry and culture’ cluster, and a fourth cluster labeled ‘mystery,’ comprised of an assortment of blogs devoted mostly to culture, generally with a conservative bias. Identifying groupings of common words and phrases, Kelly argued that conservative blogs are better than their liberal counterparts at engaging each other and staying on topic over successive posts (from a summary of Kelly’s presentation at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, 9/29/07).

In the U.S., critics accuse the U.S. blogosphere of fragmenting political discussion insulating left and right from one another’s worthy criticisms. An analogous situation was said to hold in Iran. True, new media connect like-minded individuals both within and beyond the country, and in this regard, they can serve as a valuable galvanizer of progressive opinion. But there is as yet little evidence that the form facilitates genuine engagement between liberals and conservatives, which will be an essential element in long-term political development.

Moreover, it is not the case that ‘virtual activism’ in the blogosphere translates into a willingness to physically take part in street demonstrations or protests. Many participants commented that blogs are barely ever used to organize demonstrations or political gatherings (though instant messages and cell phone texts help to coordinate meeting times and movements in an ad hoc manner).

#### **Session IV: New Media Alternatives: Radio, Television and Film**

New media may hold exciting possibilities, but most Iranians still get their news from newspapers, television, and radio. These media, more prone to central control and censorship, offer little space for alternative voices.

One exception is Radio Zamaneh – an Internet-based clearinghouse for audio recordings of music, news, and commentary. Radio Zamaneh listeners can download programs and listen to them at their convenience; likewise they can make their own recordings at home and upload them (though content is edited). Based in Amsterdam and funded by the Dutch government, Radio Zamaneh has yet to be censored by the Islamic Republic.

According to self-administered surveys, Radio Zamaneh listeners – 72% of whom reside in Iran – see the website as an “interesting and different” – that is, neither ideologically left or right – source for news and features. Other foreign-funded media are not so well received. The Islamic Republic often decries foreign-funded programming (notably Radio Farda and the Voice of America) as imperialist propaganda. Isolated and not exposed to objective information, it is easy for Iranians to be suspicious of western-based media projects, even when they do not directly challenge the regime.

Toward the end of this session, participants addressed a divide separating in-country actors from international activists. In their push for reform, activists can often interfere with the ‘quiet struggle’ against the regime that is taking place within the borders of Iran. When outside groups celebrate or draw attention to dissenting voices inside Iran, this can discredit or even endanger them. While the challenges are considerable, western actors must be aware that publicizing the reformist’s efforts is not always a positive contribution – in fact it can have quite negative consequences.

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**Session V:  
Iranian State Responses to Changing Media  
Participation**

The past seven years have seen a sustained crackdown on Internet freedoms in Iran. At the same time, government-run and government-friendly sites have ramped up their digital capabilities, producing sleek web layouts to attract a wider audience. Exploring state responses to new media, this session focused on an intensifying confrontation between conservatives and reformists – a showdown often waged on the level of images rather than arguments.

One recent confrontation involved in the arrest of a young Tehran-based blogger, Reza Valizadeh, who reported on his blog that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had paid \$150,000 apiece for German-bred security dogs. The move was incendiary not only for linking the President with the image of dogs (deemed dirty and disgraceful in Muslim culture) but also for alleging that he paid so much for them (average monthly salaries in Iran are roughly 800,000 Rial, or \$180). After being denounced by the state-run newspaper Fars, Valizadeh was arrested and forced to issue an apology on his blog – his last post to date, apparently made from prison. The incident attracted attention in the international press.

Meanwhile, the war of images continues in more subtle forms. Vibrant colors and high quality digital photos add visual appeal to the predictable headlines of official Iranian sites, leaving no doubt that Iran possesses the technical – if not yet the political – infrastructure for sophisticated online public discourse. On the reformers' side, images posted from recent student protests have featured banners showing the faces of arrested dissidents – an emotional appeal that protesters have rarely dared to use in the past.

What do these confrontations foreshadow? Arrests, protests, and an “arms race” of high-tech graphics points to what one participant called a “hidden front” in the struggle for the right to free speech. Officially, Tehran dismisses blogger critics as like Valizadeh as outlying troublemakers. In fact, however, the regime pays close attention to this growing domain of civil society, clearly aware of the potentially destabilizing effect it can have.

**Session VI:  
International Activism**

The final session offered discussants a chance to reflect on their analyses of Iranian media and society and discuss concrete strategies for pushing reform, as well as ideas for future dialogue. As at a number of previous meetings, some participants emphasized that although new media allow for a digital community that transcends national boundaries, effective reform, when it comes, will take place at the instigation of in-country actors.

But the international community can play crucial roles, from funding new media projects such as Radio Zamaneh, to offering journalism training courses for reporters from inside the country (as has Press Now, a Dutch non-profit supporting independent media). Bloggers among the Diaspora can attempt to engage more with their conservative counterparts in the hopes of initiating a more fulsome exchange of views. Participants emphasized the need to attract more journalists and bloggers from within Iran – even members of the conservative press. They also suggested that participants prepare for a follow-up meeting in 2008 by conducting research on some aspects of the Iranian press or civil society and distributing their findings to participants in advance. ■

## Women's Movements in Islam Berlin, January 29-31, 2008

### Executive Summary

The Iranian women's movement may be viewed as part of a larger struggle for women's rights throughout the Muslim world. Many of the disagreements, challenges, and forms of oppression that confront women in Iran are familiar to women in other countries, from Morocco to Malaysia, where Islamic culture predominates and *shari'ah* is the law of the land. Iranian and non-Iranian activists have much to learn from one another. But under Tehran's current regime, it is generally very difficult for Iranian activists to exchange ideas and best practices with counterparts abroad.

It was to facilitate a dialogue between Iranian and non-Iranian activists that the Aspen Institute hosted 'Women's Movements in Islam', a two day conference from January 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> in Berlin, Germany. The event was attended by twenty-nine activists, scholars, journalists, and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working throughout the Muslim world, the United States, and Europe. In the course of six panel sessions which explored the concept of Islamic feminism as well as local situations in Muslim countries from North Africa to Southeast Asia, participants explored what set them apart and what brought them together – and what they might learn from each other's experiences.

Secular liberals tend to see the term 'Muslim Feminist' as an oxymoron. Gender equality, their argument goes, is a western idea, and Islam remains a patriarchal system fundamentally opposed to women's rights. But a strong majority of the participants in 'Women's Movements in Islam' disagreed, maintaining that Islam and feminism can be combined, indeed must be combined, to promote justice for women in regions where religion plays a dominant role.

### Session I: Introduction to Islamic Feminism

In spite of this broad agreement, there was intense debate, particularly in the first session, as to how exactly Islam and feminism should be combined – in theory and in practice. Defining feminism broadly ("any (idea or action) that helps or protects the status of women"), the first speaker saw the fundamental bases of Islamic law – the *Quran* and the *hadiths* – as the useful, indeed necessary starting point for women's movements in the Muslim world. She encouraged activists and progressive scholars to see themselves as part of a larger reform movement within Islam aimed at rein-

terpreting religious texts to comport with modern realities and human rights. While the roots of this reform movement go back to nineteenth-century thinkers like Muhammad 'Abduh of Egypt and Jamal-al-Din al-Afghani, it was not until the 1990s that the hermeneutical approach gained momentum among feminists working in the Muslim world. This trend, the speaker claimed, could be attributed to a spike in literacy among Muslim women and wider translation of the *Quran* into non-Arabic languages. Today, the struggle for women's rights is not a 'clash of civilizations' between western secular equality and Islamic backwardness, but a 'struggle within Islam, for the future of Islam.' While conservatives attack feminism as heretical and a threat to the traditional family, religious extremists can be Janus-faced, recoiling at the notion of modern gender roles but eager to recruit women for *jihad*.

But not all participants thought that religion could, or should, power women's movements in the Muslim world. The second speaker split 'Islamic feminists' into two groups: those who promote women's rights because they see them as consistent with the true meaning of Islam, and those who are indifferent to Islam as a faith but see its teachings as instrumental in the larger cause of gender equality. For believers, feminism through Islam is a 'necessity'; for non-believers, it's a 'choice.'

This speaker suggested that participants explore the implications of this division in order to lay the foundation for more effective collaboration. But she also expressed apprehension toward feminists who put their faith before their feminism. If belief should become a litmus test for the Muslim reform movement, she argued, does that mean that Muslims should shun or discount the contributions of non-Muslims? More seriously, what if the essential teachings of Islam run counter to the very idea of gender equality, offering women at best a 'separate but equal' status reminiscent of African Americans in the segregated U.S. South? Muslim women, she strongly implied, should not accept such an outcome.

This presentation opened an intense debate in which the focus and fault lines shifted swiftly. One basic disagreement involved the nature and origin of Islamic feminism: some said it was a 'child of political Islam,' while others saw 'feminism' in any guise as an inescapably secular idea. Still others, while acknowledging that feminism may have emerged historically out of western secular traditions, thought that one could still be a Muslim and a secularist at the same time – that is, a believer who holds that religion is a private matter and shouldn't be used to structure public or political life. The majority of participants believed that



Islam so permeates life in Muslim societies that trying to circumvent it is futile, but others acknowledged that even in conservative countries like Iran, the 'secularist feminist discourse' of the West has had an undeniable impact.

At the heart of these discussions lay central questions about reform and identity: what role does – or should – a group or individual's identity (Western, Islamic, or secular) play in women's movements in the Islamic world?

The first session revealed an array of ideological differences, even among those who agreed on the basic compatibility of Islam and feminism. But it also revealed a common desire to move beyond ideology – or 'the dictatorship of ideology' as one participant put it – and concentrate on practical solutions. Particularly, the Iranian participants seemed to display less of an interest in the ins and outs of academic debates over identity and reform. Their mindset was more practical.

## Session II: The Religious Framework of Womens' Movements

Session II presented a case study of Sisters In Islam (SIS), a Muslim women's rights and legal counseling organization based in Malaysia. Aspen had also intended to include a discussion of a Turkish women's rights NGO but the presenter had to withdraw shortly before the event due to illness.

SIS was founded in 1987 by Muslim women lawyers concerned by the ways in which Islam had been used to perpetuate discrimination against women. The group focuses its efforts exclusively in Malaysia, a multi-confessional society with a population of twenty-seven million, sixty percent of whom are Muslim. The government is a constitutional elective monarchy with significant powers concentrated in the executive branch. But for the Muslim majority, matters pertaining to religion are adjudicated in *shari'ah* courts.

SIS activities break down into three categories. First, they raise awareness of gender injustice and promote women's rights through publications, research and a weekly column in one of Malaysia's leading newspapers *Utusan Malaysia*. They also hold public lectures and workshops to train grassroots leaders in faith-based approaches to women's rights advocacy. Since 2003, the group has provided legal counsel in approximately 700 cases a year dealing with

gender discrimination. SIS is also the only religious organization in the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), an influential consortium of NGOs founded in 1985 to 'raise national awareness of violence against women and to campaign for a domestic violence law.'

Recent SIS accomplishments include: providing Islamic arguments to extend legal protections for women suffering from domestic abuse to the Muslim population; helping to lead a group of NGOs lobbying the Malaysian civil High Court in 2004-5 to overturn the '*Hudud Law*,' which offered husbands a loophole for winning custody of their children by converting to Islam; and researching and reporting on the deleterious effects of polygamy on family life across Malaysia, an ongoing project begun in 2003. SIS is also a leading member of the Article 11 coalition, which upholds the Federal Constitution as the supreme law of the land, and the *Gerakan Mansuhkan ISA* group, which lobbies for the repeal of Malaysia's Internal Security Act, a law limiting habeas corpus and free speech.

SIS owes its effectiveness in part to peculiarities of the Malaysian context. With a multi-party parliamentary system and a diverse population, Malaysians are used to working across ethnic and religious lines on a variety of political issues. With some high-profile members (including one parliamentary candidate), SIS enjoys wide exposure, even among non-Muslims. Its funding comes mostly from Malaysian and international foundations; substantial gifts have also been given by a Chinese philanthropist and a Muslim entrepreneur.

As impressive as SIS is, some wondered at the extent to which the organization could serve as a model for efforts in other countries. One participant from the Middle East was surprised that SIS could raise money from out-of-country sources, which is not possible for Iranian NGOs. SIS has also benefited from Malaysia's rather stable parliamentary system and the existence of a functional civil society – typified by groups such as the Article 11 coalition and the JAG. What is more, because *shari'ah* does not apply to the entire population, SIS can pursue an avenue of reform not open in theocratic countries like Iran: lobbying the national government to restrict the jurisdiction of *shari'ah* on specific points (as SIS did in campaigning against the *Hudud Law*) rather than having to struggle to reform the code from within.

### Session III: Women's Movements in Iran

From a Malaysian success story, discussion turned to the immense challenges facing women in Iran. The speaker offered a four-phase history of the Iranian women's movement since the 1979 Revolution, an illuminating presentation, which helped to clarify how outside actors might abet the work of in-country activists.

It is easy to forget that, in its early stages, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 augured a better future for women. While still in exile in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed that men and women would have equal roles in the new state, and shortly after the take-over of power, the Family Protection Law (1967), which reformers had fought for years under the Shah, was abolished. But the question of women's rights was pushed aside with the onset of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980. Iran's leadership pressed women to follow the pious and patriotic "model of Zaynab," the daughter of 'Ali and granddaughter of the Prophet who fought in holy wars against the Umayyad ruler Yazid Ibn Muawiyah. This model became shorthand for a view that considered agitating for women's rights to be a threat to Islam and national well-being. During this period, education became segregated by gender and the veil was made compulsory.

In the wake of the Iran-Iraq War, the situation for women marginally improved. Pragmatist President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani loosened *hijab* requirements and adjusted the Family Law so that mothers could more easily take custody of the thousands of children left fatherless by the war. This second period, stretching from 1989 to the election of President Mohammad Khatami in 1997, also saw the emergence of the *Farzaneh* academic journal and *Zanan* ('Women') magazine, powerful forums for the discussion of controversial women's issues. Women began to attend university in greater numbers, and general economic prosperity helped women to get jobs. Women became more vocal. The number of Iranian women's NGOs increased, but when some attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, they were harassed by Iranian security forces.

A third phase, from 1997 to 2005, saw the further loosening of restrictions under the reform-minded Presidency of Mohammad Khatami and the 'intellectuals' he brought into government. Khatami appointed an advisor on women's issues and presided over the first cabinet to include a woman member (as director of Iran's Environmental Agency). The number of women's NGOs further increased, and street

protests became more frequent. But theocrats would be pushed only so far.

Participants in a conference held in Berlin by the Heinrich Böll Foundation were arrested upon their return to Tehran in 2000. Some of Iran's most prominent feminists were imprisoned.

Elected in 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has reportedly proven "a nightmare," and the situation under this fourth historical stage of the women's movement has proved "the worst since the beginning of the revolution." *Hijab* restrictions have become tightly enforced. A 'fanatical' – ie. reactionary – family law was introduced to the *majlis*. 'Motherhood' is the predominant role that young women are pushed to imagine for themselves. Police beat women in major street protests in March and June of 2006. In January 2008, while this Aspen conference was in session, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance revoked *Zanan* magazine's license to publish, at least temporarily ending the career of the country's most famous women's magazine. On the positive side, petition has become a popular form of activism – witness recent signature campaigns to outlaw stoning and allow women into soccer stadiums.

Faced with grim realities, but buoyed by memories of a recent, more liberal past, how can activists best promote reform in Iran? The discussion that followed focused mostly on how best to integrate the efforts of in- and out- of country actors. Western media such as the Voice of America, the presenter claimed, reach a broad audience and can have a significant impact in Iran. But VOA's programming lacks quality: too many of their "experts" are woefully uninformed about Iran in general and the situation of women within the regime in particular. Western news media need to cover Iranian politics and society more thoroughly and with more nuance, if they hope to gain credibility over and against a regime that ceaselessly seeks to discredit the 'imperialist' West.

The Internet was said to be critical. Already it has had a dramatic impact in Iran, often by simply providing access to information. Young women's first exposure to the concept of feminism tends to be through websites, one participant said. Farsi-language blogs based in and outside of the country provide some of the last places where the strategies and tactics of the women's movement in Iran can be openly discussed.

While the presenter seemed optimistic about the impact of western media – "old" as well as new – she emphasized that providers needed to do a better job of targeting young

audiences, particularly young women. She suggested that the issue of identity – so fraught for most participants at the conference – might be less divisive for younger generations raised in an increasingly global world. One participant with knowledge of the situation averred that journalists can only be “thirty percent themselves” when writing for mainstream women’s publications in Iran. Weblogs, by contrast, give writers a chance to be “ninety percent themselves.”

Public discourse is marked off by “red lines” that cannot be crossed. Sexuality is out of bounds. So is criticizing Islam or the *hijab* laws, though these topics can be more openly addressed on the web. What makes the subjects taboo is to a large extent the regime’s fear that Islam and feminism might “join forces.” If the feminists can portray themselves as authentically Islamic, they may be able to drive a wedge between Iran’s state and religious authority. Ahmedinejad’s strategy is the reverse: by linking feminism with the ‘heretical West,’ he turns patriarchy and Iranian patriotism into forms of piety. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that state and non-state actors should better understand this dynamic.

Loudly threatening Iran and publicly denouncing its leaders, the U.S. and other groups were said to make it easier sometimes for the regime to shore up support at home.

#### Session IV: Iranian Family Law

From a survey of the place of women in Iranian society, the participants zoomed in on the issue of Iranian Family Law. The history of this deeply complicated area of jurisprudence sheds light on how hard it can be to achieve reform through theological-juridical argument – particularly in a culture whose language, Farsi, lacks a word for the western notion of “secularism.”

Shortly before the revolution, women began making inroads into public life. In 1978, two women served as Ministers to the Shah and thirty (out of two hundred and ninety) served in the *majlis*. But the public roles of a small number of women belied a profoundly oppressive domestic situation for the majority. This was less a result of legal strictures than of a general lawlessness in matters pertaining to the family. The Family Protection Law, passed in 1967, made the situation somewhat better. It created special courts to deal with family law issues. These courts did not apply *sharī‘ah*, but rather a civil code, and they were

staffed by judges trained in civil law. The Family Protection Law gave women limited rights of guardianship over children, forbade extra-judicial divorce, and required men to seek permission from their wife before taking a second wife.

While it was in effect, the Family Protection Law was not seen as particularly progressive, but after the revolution women began to lament its loss. Indeed, in this presenter’s estimation, in contrast to that of the previous presenter, the situation for women has never since been as good as it was in the last years of the Shah. After 1979, the ranks of Iranian refugees swelled with women and children fleeing repressive measures against women on issues like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody.

There have been no profound amendments to family law since the revolution, though both conservatives and reformers have won minor victories. Barring exceptional conditions (such as the husband’s ‘bad behavior’, ‘non-maintenance’ for up to 6 months, impotence, or insanity), women may not initiate divorce proceedings, while men can do so under any pretext. The legal age for marriage has increased for girls from nine to thirteen, but virgins still cannot get married without their father’s permission. Adultery is punished with one hundred lashes, and women are generally entitled to half the “blood money” (or reparations for damages in the case of physical injury or death) that men are. Under *shī‘ite* religious law, women cannot inherit property, and are entitled to one half the wealth that men are. Their testimony in court counts for half of a man’s.

Despite these discriminatory conditions, some participants averred that Iranian family law was on the whole more progressive than that which has taken shape in Iraq since the U.S. invasion. This serves as a reminder that democratic institutions do not guarantee fair treatment of women.

The presenter interspersed her report with anecdotes that underscored the difficulties of reforming *sharī‘ah* from within – that is, through *ijtihad*, or reinterpretation of religious texts.

For women who have assimilated western notions of secularism, it may be natural to embrace a religious feeling that separates the religious and non-religious realms. But that does not mean it is possible for a majority of believing Iranians to uphold such distinctions.

Other avenues of reform may, however, exist. As one participant mentioned toward the end of the panel, greater thought should be given among reformers to the faith-

bound notion of *orfi shodan* – the idea that laws should comport with social circumstances. According to the panelist, this term holds has no explicit links with the ideas of human rights or liberalism, but it might provide levers for tactfully introduced legal reform that enhances the rights of women through sound Islamic argument.

### Session V: Movements in the Middle East and North Africa

Session V offered an overview of the history of Arab women's movements with a focus on Morocco, which, along with Tunisia, is known for having the most progressive family law in the Arab world. These presentations put the Iranian women's movement in a broader context and allowed Iranian participants the chance to analyze factors contributing to Moroccan success in securing legal reforms through Islamic jurisprudence.

The first presenter made distinction between “women's movements” and “feminist movements” in Arab history. The former, with roots in the late 19th century, were instigated by male elites (such as the Egyptian Qassim Amin, author of *Tahrir Al-Mar'a* (Liberation of Woman (1899) and the Tunisian Taher Haddad, author of *Our Women in the Sharī'ah and Society* (1930)) and pursued demands such as improved education for girls and women's suffrage. The movements promoted and emphasized women's role in the arts. They believed reform should, and would, come gradually, and they often linked gender equality with a larger struggle for independence from colonial rule.

By contrast, what we now recognize as the “feminist movement” emerged in the Arab world much later, gaining momentum only after 1980. If women's movements defined themselves by the goals they pursued (improved education, suffrage, etc), feminists acted more “strategically.” They pressed governments to pass specific legislation to combat different forms of gender inequality in the home and the workplace. They have tended not to be satisfied with the idea that progress for women should, or would, come gradually. In contrast to the nationalist alignments of many of the earlier reformers, feminists worked together with women activists from around the world and drew authority from international human rights norms.

Both movements generally have looked West for inspiration, and in some cases, notably Turkey, progressive family law came into existence as a result of outright imitation of

European models. But in two other recent examples, Tunisia and Morocco, women gained rights through Islamic jurisprudence. The second and third presenters offered an in depth analysis of the 2005 reforms of the *mudawwana* (family law) in Morocco, which have drawn interest from lawmakers from Egypt to Iran.

In Morocco, as in Iran, the independence movement raised hopes of greater gender equality only to dash them shortly after a native governments took control. In Morocco conservative ‘*ulamā*’ (clergy) passed the first *mudawwana* shortly after independence in 1954; despite minor reforms in the late 1980s, it remained a highly repressive code until 1999, when King Muhammad VI ascended the throne and signalled his intention to make family law reform a priority. Without the King, our presenter claimed, *mudawwana* reform would have been “unthinkable.” He first convened a committee to recommend legislation comprised of ‘*ulamā*’, sociologists, and – crucially – women. These recommendations took stock of international human rights norms but were grounded in interpretations of the legal traditions and holy texts regarding the family law. The reformers in government worked here, to portray their new laws as rigorously “Islamic,” thus depriving traditionalists of the argument that the reforms went against Muslim or Moroccan identity.

This success may be viewed as the culmination of a years-long “Islamicization” of the women's movement in Morocco. Beginning in the mid 1980s, the secular trend that had long dominated the women's movement in Morocco began to incorporate religious arguments as well. Women's leaders began to write in Arabic as well as French. The emphasis slowly shifted from social causes – polemics against the veil, for instance – to the demand for political rights. Women's NGOs proliferated in the 1990s. During the *mudawwana* reform debates of 2004-5, particularly the younger feminists were noted for pursuing religious lines of argument and pointing to Morocco's “culture of patriarchy,” rather than Islam, as the source of injustice.

The outcome of these debates was a new family law that was hailed almost immediately as a model for reform throughout the Arab world. Most participants at the Aspen conference had at least some knowledge of its statutes and were excited about the influence it has, or may potentially have, in other countries – even while some acknowledged the new law's imperfections.

Where women had previously been accorded the status of minors, the new *mudawwana* makes men and women equal before the law. The minimum marriage age for women has

been increased to eighteen from fifteen. Polygamy remains legal but restricted; a husband has to get the approval of his wife and a judge before marrying a second woman, and Morocco has successfully limited polygamy to only eight hundred known cases countrywide. Women now have the right to initiate divorce proceedings themselves, and men are required to file for divorce; they cannot simply declare their marriage null, as the law stipulates in other countries. Divorced wives have the right to a greater percentage of the property acquired after the marriage.

Reactions to the new laws have been predictable. Conservatives, with support among the poor, have decried the reforms as a threat to Islam and to the family structure, whereas the modernists have by and large embraced them. The rest of the Muslim world – surprisingly, even conservative regimes – have shown interest in learning more about how to adapt these reforms to their own countries: not long after Morocco’s reforms, Egypt and Algeria amended their own marriage laws. Moroccan delegations have presented their ideas to the Iranian and Bahraini governments. But it remains to be seen how widely these liberal measures will be adopted beyond North Africa – or even gain traction within Moroccan society itself. An illiteracy rate of sixty percent and widespread ignorance of the *mudawwana* among Morocco’s rural and poor populations blunt the reforms’ impact. As for the broader Muslim world, it is worth considering whether the effectiveness of reforms in North Africa has something to do with the influence of French political ideas – notably the strong emphasis on *laïcité* – among Moroccan and Tunisian political elites. Perhaps these countries are uniquely prone to secular revisions of the legal code.

Moroccan reformers were helped by having the support of the King and the country’s Francophone cultural influences. There was another issue as well. In 2003, as the *mudawwana* reforms were being debated, a series of deadly terrorist attacks in Casablanca mobilized popular opinion against religious hardliners who might have played a more prominent role in resisting the reforms.

#### **Session VI: Occident, Images of the Oblique Women’s Movements**

To what extent do stereotypes of “Eastern Woman” and “Western Woman” obstruct cooperation between reform-minded actors in the East and West? This question sparked lively debate, which grew only livelier as the session went

on to address diverse topics, including Iranian family law and honor killings. To conclude the conference, participants offered recommendations as to how Aspen might structure a follow-up meeting.

According to the presenter, Muslim women are often portrayed in the West as “subordinate” to and “less intelligent” than men. Women are caricatured as “black-clad” pariahs who spend “all day in the kitchen,” and “have no political rights.” It’s commonly assumed that Muslim women stand no chance of liberation unless they follow western models of secular feminism. Views of Muslim women in the media, the presenter averred, are further tainted by U.S. racism toward Muslims in general.

In the Muslim world, western women tend to be seen as “promiscuous” and neglectful of their children and families. They work long hours for hypocritical employers who espouse gender equality but in fact treat women as inferior to men. The presenter also suggested that some Muslims see western women as cowardly for not forcefully standing up – presumably as a group – against injustices perpetuated by the U.S. administration.

The presenter called for a concerted effort to combat these stereotypes; some participants seconded her by advocating an ideology aimed at “valorizing the other.” But others questioned whether the problem of stereotypes was not secondary to – perhaps even a dangerous distraction from – the real issue, which was active discrimination and mistreatment of women in the Muslim world. Participants with experience in the western media admitted that portrayals of Muslim women in the West were sometimes one-dimensional – but that was because Middle Eastern regimes rarely permit outsiders frankly to portray the realities women face within their borders – while women are often afraid to speak candidly to the press for fear of retribution. Hand wringing over stereotypes and their academic support-structure, the ‘Orientalist Discourse’, can sugar coat the terrible situation women contend with in their societies.

Still, there was a genuine frustration with what some participants viewed as the “one-sided” relationship between Muslim and western reformers. While it is taken for granted that Muslim women can learn from their western counterparts, the opposite is rarely entertained. Some participants wanted to see a greater openness among western feminists to the insights of Muslim women. It was suggested that particularly the “differentialists” – feminists advocating that women differentiate their roles from men’s, rather than emulating them – might learn from Muslim experience.



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At this point, the session shifted topics to address two issues which many participants felt deserved greater attention. The first of these was the situation of women in Iran, which one participant believed had not been accurately represented in Session IV.

Iranian laws are repressive, but social mores are laxer than the law would suggest, she argued, citing a *Zanan* survey that fifty one percent of university students were women, and although the legal age for marriage is quite low (thirteen), the average actual marriage age is twenty-four. These remarks, which sparked some heated exchanges, further highlight the central ambivalence on display in this session: anger and frustration toward the negative image that many Muslim countries have, coupled with a genuine recognition of the need to reform regressive laws and practices in these countries.

Also addressed, in a brief but fruitful exchange at the end of the session, was the issue of honor killings – usually murders of women that have brought ‘dishonor’ to their families – which often go unpunished in the Muslim world. Participants suggested that the practice was linked to stridently patriarchal or tribal cultures rather than to Islam *per se*. Hence instances of honor killings in conservative South American societies, as well as the lack of honor killings in Malaysia, which unlike Arab and Persian regions lacks tribal traditions. Tunisia, one participant claimed, had successfully outlawed honour killings while many other countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon, have tried unsuccessfully to pass and enforce prohibitions against honor killing. ■

### Executive Summary

What signs of freedom of expression remain in Iran today? Sixteen bloggers, journalists, scholars, and activists traveled from Iran, North America, and Europe to answer this question at the Aspen Institute’s third workshop on Digital Media and Journalism in Iran. Some had taken part in previous gatherings in September and December of 2007; others were at Aspen for the first time. The discussions furthered Aspen’s long-term goal of cultivating a network of influential progressive figures among Iran’s new media community, providing them with a forum to share knowledge, form connections, and foster an awareness of common challenges.

The workshop began with an overview of the latest and most comprehensive research available on the size, content, and communication patterns of the Iranian blogosphere. In working sessions that followed, participants gave short presentations initiating discussion on five subjects: the conservative blogosphere; the Internet and youth culture; the different news coverage by “classical media” vs. the blogosphere of the March 2008 parliamentary elections; foreign news agencies and their strategies for engaging Iranian audiences; and Iranian art and political expression.

Over the course of the two-day event, participants frequently returned to three key issues: First, the impact of information technologies on conservative mores and Islamic jurisprudence, i.e. is new media simply enhancing Iranians’ access to like-minded voices, or generating tolerance and engagement between different viewpoints? Second, many participants regretted that the reformist bloggers are not generally as well-trained in objective, factual reporting as journalists are – a shortcoming which hinders their impact. Finally, the impact, strengths, and weaknesses of Farsi-language foreign news agencies were discussed.

## Session I: Overview of the Use and Users of the Internet in Iran

There are an estimated 18 million Internet users among Iran's population of 71 million (25.5 per 100 inhabitants). Of the country's 11.1 million Internet subscribers, only a small minority (465,000) have broadband access. The cost of connecting to the web from home is high, and many Iranians sign on from school, work, or cafés. Government censors block hundreds of sites. Despite these obstacles, the Farsi blogosphere is large and diverse, and centered around roughly 60,000 active<sup>1</sup> (i.e. updated at least once a week) sites devoted to issues ranging from Iranian politics to poetry, pop culture, personal religious experience, and Islamic law.

This session's first speakers, two researchers, presented the findings of an ongoing, 11-month study of this core group of active sites. Their work focuses on determining who the Iranian bloggers are, what they are talking about, and which sites they link to. Although many Western intellectuals assume that the Iranian blogosphere is an "oppositional space" filled with "young democrats opposed to the regime", this was not found to be the case. Rather, the Iranian blogosphere seems to be divided into four thematic groupings or "poles" (clusters): one comprised of secular and reformist sites; another focusing on conservative political and religious sites; a third devoted to Persian poetry; and a fourth which the researchers termed "mixed network", made up of social networking sites, personal diaries, and pop culture fora. Perhaps half of the most active Iranian blogs directly address political topics, though the presenters cautioned that the political dimensions of blogging as a form of expression - relatively resistant to censorship, highly individualist - ought not be overlooked, and indeed became a topic of discussion in later sessions.

The presentation put forth many interesting findings. Most Farsi bloggers live in Iran, though there are significant voices among the Diaspora. Most are men, though women make up about one third of secular bloggers, roughly one quarter of the in-country reformist blogs, and, possibly more than one third of the conservative and religious bloggers. Conservatives use pseudonyms far more often than reformist and secularists. The reasons for this are unclear, but two possible explanations were given. Conservatives are more likely than reformists to have political careers and want to protect them. They are also more likely rigorously to adhere to cultural and religious strictures against egotism and personal immodesty.

Criticism of the regime is not limited to the reformist sites. After extensive surveys of blog content, the researchers found many conservatives complaining about inflation, high unemployment, and corruption. But while it seems that they are ready to attack President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, they shy away from attacking the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the clerical leadership.

The presenters also reported on what they learned about the bloggers' patterns of reference and communication - so-called link trails. The most linked-to sites - among conservative and in-country reformists alike - are mainstream news sources such as farsnews.ir and isna.ir. Voice of America and Radio Farda are popular with some reformist and secular sites. YouTube and Wikipedia are making inroads, even with a handful of conservatives, but are still not widely utilized.

The second presentation, from a speaker joining the meeting via live video streaming, was challenged by technical difficulties. His research also focused on link trails, specifically those of the more popular reformist and secular sites. Among these, the Dutch-based interactive news site Radio Zamaneh and the BBC's Persian-language news service are regularly the most referenced; other news sites such as roozonline.com and Radio Farda also receive significant attention.

In the discussion that followed these presentations, participants asked about intercommunication between the blogosphere's reformist and conservative poles. Although the political extremes rarely engage one another in substantive debate, there is recognition of the existence of the "other side," and conservative and reformist bloggers do occasionally exchange views with each other. They also share a reliance on mainstream news sources. The researchers concluded that the Farsi blogosphere was, on balance, not significantly less polarized than the American blogosphere and far more integrated than other countries they had studied, notably Russia.

## Session II: Conservative Blogs and Websites / Online Fatwas: Islamic Jurisprudence on the Internet

The influence of Iran's "conservative" blogosphere is significant and growing. This session examined its two major wings: political blogs broadly supportive of the Iranian regime and theological-juridical blogs, many of which are

<sup>1</sup> Definitions of "active" apparently vary.

based out of the *hawzahs* (religious seminaries) of the holy city of Qom.

Domestic issues dominate the conservative political blogs. The sites discuss the character and speeches of clerics and politicians as well as government policies. Somewhat less frequently, discussion will turn to international issues like Iran's nuclear weapons program and broader Middle East politics (especially the Israeli-Palestinian dispute). The Iran-Iraq War is a touchstone. The format of these blogs is not very different from western sites: bloggers encourage and respond to readers' feedback. President Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei both have blogs; both prominently feature responses to posts that are presented as reader input. While links to mainstream news sources are common, conservative sites (and reformist sites, for that matter) have a tendency to trust third- and fourth-hand information as established fact – one facet of the problematic Iranian attitudes toward journalistic objectivity, a topic speakers returned to in later sessions. Conservative posts tend to be longer than reformist posts, which by and large follow the western model of short and punchy commentary.

If information technology is transforming Iranian political discourse, it is having an arguably greater effect on the study, organization, and interpretation of the key sources of *Ja'fari fiqh* (the sources of the *shī'ah* interpretation of Islamic law) as found in the *Quran*, the *hadiths*, and legal rulings or *fatwas*. Qom, the center of *shī'ah* scholarship, houses one hundred and fifty research centers where students can access databases of the over five hundred textbooks of *Ja'fari* jurisprudence. The second speaker averred that the *hawzahs* of Qom boast greater information technology capabilities than the state run universities.

The precise effect of these technologies on Islamic jurisprudence is still not easy to determine, but certain features are clear. The organization of religious knowledge is becoming more efficient. Seminarians no longer need to rely exclusively on rote memorization or spend time tracking down precedents. Instead, they can search databases like the Encyclopedia of *Shari'ah* Jurisprudence (the *al-mojam* program). This capability, the presenter speculated, may over time diminish reliance on the authority of senior clerics. It may also help bring scholars' attention to how interpretations have evolved to keep pace with the times and may also help to resurrect neglected, possibly more liberal, strains of jurisprudence.

The Internet is also opening theological discourse to more players, including reformers from the Diaspora. One example of this is the controversy sparked by a February 8,

2008 online interview with the University of Berkeley-based Iranian scholar Abdolkarim Soroush in the newspaper *Kargozaraan*. Soroush's controversial views – he understands the *Quran* as a historically-bounded rather than eternal text which expresses not God's literal words but the Prophet's interpretation of them – have been in print for years, but they seem only to have caused real debate among conservative theologians in the wake of the recent online interview. The speaker also pointed to online discussions of a set of liberal *fatwas* regarding headscarves from the blogs of reformist clerics Ayatollah Montazari and *hojatoleslams* M. Kadivar and H. Qabel.

After the presentations, participants debated the extent to which technological innovations would actually liberalize *shī'ah* jurisprudence. Some doubted that the new voices would have much effect: the Internet was simply making discussion among “a small group of ‘*ulamā*’” more efficient, not more open. The theological-religious blogosphere is surely not a free market of ideas. But other participants were optimistic: one asserted that new media were advancing liberal interpretations in the same manner as the printing press spread protestant ideas through sixteenth-century Europe. Another pointed out that in order to refute liberal views, conservative clerics had either to reiterate them or link to them, thus publicizing them, albeit in negative light.

### Session III: How Do New Means of Communication Influence Iran's Youth?

From conservative bloggers the discussion moved to Iranian youth, who comprise the majority of Internet users in a country where sixty percent of the population is under the age of twenty-eight. How much time are young Iranians spending online, and how do online communities influence youth culture, social interaction, and political sensibilities?

The first speaker began with an exploration of how Farsi has evolved in the face of a new, more direct and spontaneous online discourse. The language's two registers – an elaborate and formal written idiom and a much less formal spoken one – have been gradually collapsing into an “on-line” Farsi prominent in blogs and social networking sites. These fora have encouraged what the speaker termed “good egocentrism,” encouraging young Iranians in particular to discover their own identities and voices. This shows how the Internet has significantly expanded the level of individualism inside the country. Online communication

is also remolding attitudes toward public and private spheres. More than one participant echoed the provocative point that Iranians find something “erotic” in how online discourse dispenses with traditional propriety (particularly limitations on male-female interaction) and encourages open expression of emotions, reactions, and thought processes.

The Internet is also fostering closer bonds between the native population and the Diaspora. Some Iranian expatriate authors have started blogs of their own and are using them to foster audiences inside the country. The presenter signaled out the case of Reza Ghassemi, a Paris-based writer, who published his recent novel in serial form on the Internet, incorporating reader feedback as he went along.

The second speaker expanded the discussion to other elements of online culture, beginning with the “cafénets” where many young people sign on. These are public places where the gaze of others may limit what users feel comfortable writing – or which sites they are comfortable visiting. Overwhelmingly, the speaker claimed, pop culture and social networking sites are bringing young people online in the first place. He lamented that the youth seem more interested in music, gaming, and gossip than political and news blogs. Much popular music such as hip-hop and rock n’ roll, is banned in Iran, resulting in a brisk online trade in mp3 files. One particularly interesting amalgam of old and new are the so called “eulogy sites,” where young people post original pop music compositions praising clerical leaders (who have roundly denounced this form of publicity).

The youth’s apathy toward “serious” political issues, the speaker argued, was at least in part due to the poor standards of Iranian journalism. Neither the blogs nor the state-sponsored news agencies are committed to objective, factual reporting, and their lack of professionalism trivializes them. In society at large, journalism as a vocation does not enjoy the respect it has won in the West, particularly over the last forty years; doctors and lawyers are considered greater intellectual authorities. But as a long term side effect the web-based political culture has helped to raise a new kind of tolerance among the different political and social communities.

Although social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook are banned, resourceful users access them through proxy servers. Many young Iranians have discontinued their multiple personal blogs in favor of these sites, which might help to account for the significant decline in active Farsi blogs. The majority of the group agreed that blogs

have been a kind of “fashion” for young people during the last five years.

Questions in session three focused largely on a factual issue. Participants disagreed as to how many Iranians access the Internet from their homes. Some contended that personal computers were hard to find and Internet connections costly. Others said that, particularly with the government’s recent purported installation of 30,000 km of fiber optic cable, Internet access is widely available and that “anyone who can afford a personal computer” has one. The Iranian government has been seen by some speakers as slipping into a catch-22 situation: their interest in introducing modern IT-technology to improve the Iranian economy collides with their permanent attempts to control virtual activities of civil society activists.

#### **Session IV: Parliamentary Elections in Iran: Digital and Classical Media Coverage**

Although heralded as a chance to showcase the influence of Iran’s reformist blogosphere, the March 2008 parliamentary elections did nothing of the sort, according to the fourth session’s speaker.

The blogs’ performance was poor for three reasons, he stated. First, they failed to uncover any “new” news about the candidates or the issues. The speaker blamed their lack of professional training. If the mainstream media is dominated by regime mouthpieces, he said, the new media is overly subjective and derivative; neither is prepared to provide unbiased, accurate coverage. Second, Iranian bloggers were not free to express their beliefs as most reform blogs are run by well-known activists who fear retribution from the government. Third, even the best reformist blogs lack large in-country audiences. Many Iranians remain politically apathetic. They feel powerless and have little interest in an election cycle debate that focuses more on candidates’ characters than on policy issues.

According to the speaker, the most comprehensive election coverage came from mehrnews.ir, a regime-friendly news site. The biggest media controversy came from a conservative blog, rajanews.ir, when it attacked the grandson of Ayatollah Khamenei for extravagant living. The disqualification of reformist candidates was not as major an issue as it was made out to be in the western press, since most Iranians anticipated this behavior by the Revolutionary Council.

After the presentation, a participant asked whether the speaker thought reformist bloggers would take a greater role in Iran's 2009 presidential elections. The presenter averred that because the clerical establishment may drop their support of Ahmadinejad due to his poor management of the economy, the next election might be more interesting.

But he also emphasized that elections are not the best measure of blogs' impact. New media are best at promoting grassroots causes (such as the campaign to stop the stoning of women) and catching, albeit irregularly, stories that go unnoticed. He said an example of this is the case of a woman in the city of Hamdi who was possibly murdered while in police custody after having been arrested for walking alone with her boyfriend. Blogs were also used to leak a memo from the Culture Ministry outlining the topics of official news media are forbidden to report on.

#### **Session V: How to Talk from the Outside: Foreign Media Influence in Iran**

The fifth session shifted discussion from in-country media to foreign news agencies and the different methods they use to communicate with Iranian audiences. Speakers reported on the work of the BBC World Service Trust, which trains and publishes Iranian reporters, Radio Farda, and Deutsche Welle's Persian-language news site, a division of the German agency's DW-World international news service. How do these organizations utilize the Internet and what effect do they have on the Iranian population?

All foreign news entities face two challenges: getting local news out of Iran and broadcasting news into Iran. While the BBC World Service Trust and the Deutsche Welle websites are not censored, BBC Persian and U.S.-funded operations like Radio Farda and Voice of America are (though they can be accessed in Iran through proxy services). Nonetheless, all speakers said the agencies prefer the Internet to traditional radio broadcasts because the web provides audiences with continuous access to content as well as the opportunity to interact with editors and reporters.

These audiences offer not only feedback but also, critically, news itself. Roughly one third of the reader mail sent to DW-World offers updates or rumors about Iranian affairs. Many editors at foreign publications have been out of the country for years, and their agencies are not allowed to keep correspondents in Iran. Getting a sense for "what's

news" in Iran is very hard. Most Western sites take their cues from the Iranian mainstream press. The BBC World Service Trust has to some extent circumvented this problem by offering online training courses for Iranian journalists. Through closed-access sites ("virtual newsrooms"), these young men and women work with London-based editors in honing their reporting and writing skills. They also provide scoops that the outside media might otherwise not pick up.

Most of the foreign agencies also look to the Iranian blogosphere for stories, though these are sometimes untrustworthy due to their biased nature. NGOs and in-country informants are used when possible to confirm reports. Subjects that are taboo in Iran receive some attention in the foreign press, but not too much; frankness on topics like homosexuality and dating has been found to turn off some Iranian listeners. Some participants argued that the foreign agencies should report more on sensitive topics that receive no press coverage in Iran, while others thought they should make a greater effort to reflect Iran's "collective consciousness" and make better efforts to show respect toward Islamic culture and customs.

The liveliest debate of the session was over how – or whether – foreign news services should try to be balanced and objective. It began when the speaker presenting on Radio Farda criticized the BBC Persian News Service for being insufficiently critical of the Iranian regime. The group split between participants favoring the strictly neutral standards of the BBC and those who felt the foreign media were not just observers of but also participants in the struggle for reform. Some expressed a general distrust of all out-of-country journalists: "They always have an agenda," said one participant who cited the example of the Iraqi Diaspora press and their support of the U.S. invasion in Iraq. Others pointed out that Iranian audiences expect bias in news media, and foreign agencies should not pull their punches. The speaker presenting on Radio Farda also announced that the agency's editors in Prague occasionally feel pressure to avoid issues that might offend their U.S. funders, such as the Abu Ghraib affair.

#### **Session VI: Talking Art: Another Freedom of Expression?**

In addition to foreign news agencies, art is becoming a controversial topic in Iran. In the final session, two Iranian artists – one living in Iran and the other in exile – reflected



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on censorship, the politics of artistic expression, Iranian clichés, and the market for Iranian art in the West.

Ahmadinejad's government has censored art more aggressively than any administration since the 1980s. Still, in choosing targets, the authorities do not apply consistent standards, and their strategy seems to be aimed at spreading a sense of fear and uncertainty rather than at actually eliminating all offensive artwork from the public realm. But even artists who are not censored run the risk of becoming victims of Islamic vigilante groups who deface artwork and report individuals to the Culture Ministry.

Less tyrannical than the censors but still frustrating are western notions of how Iranian society "should" be depicted in art. The first speaker noted that an artist whose work portrays women in chadors, poverty, and oppression is far more likely to find a receptive western audience than one who focuses on more uplifting or apolitical sides of Iranian life. When participants asked what western audiences could do to help the artist community in Iran, the speaker encouraged greater openness to "new narratives" of Iranian life. He also mentioned that some of the most provocative and covertly political commentary was taking place via an art form appreciated by very few in the West, namely the Iranian soap opera. ■

### Executive Summary

The Iranian women's movement exists in the context of the larger struggle for Muslim women's rights in the framework of *shari'ah* law. But Iran is set apart by its backdrop of a uniquely liberal history and widespread and growing support for feminist change. Despite positive developments, the current regime makes it difficult for women to meet and exchange ideas whether in Iran or abroad.

The international community used to have more sway – albeit limited – over Iran, holding discussions and sending delegates into the country. Now, grappling with the nuclear threat has grabbed international attention, overshadowing the human rights situation. Participants in this conference discussed how women's rights could make progress in light of Iran's precarious situation and the regime's suspicion of the West. The participants believed that grassroots desire for an improvement, combined with international attention and pressure could effect change in support of the women's and other civil society movements in Iran.

It was to facilitate dialogue between members of the women's movement in Iran who are spread across the world that the Aspen Institute hosted "The Women's Movement in Iran," on June 5-6, 2008 in Berlin, Germany. The conference was attended by scholars, activists, authors, and journalists who work in Muslim majority countries, Europe, and the U.S.. During six panel discussions, participants explored topics such as legal reforms and women's situation in Iran, marriage and divorce laws, the challenges of current gender segregation in Iran, the current outline of women's campaigns, and discussed ideas for future developments and cooperation.

### Session I: Legal Reforms and the Iranian Women's Movement

The first presenter emphasized changing the legal framework as the best way to improve the position of women in Iran. She argued that unlike most other Muslim countries, the Iranian government has taken a step backward in protecting the rights of women – most notably by repealing the Family Protection Law of 1975. The legal watershed for Iranian feminists was the creation of the Family Protection Law, which was written by lawyers instead of clerics. It was introduced in 1967 and was significantly amended in 1975. One major aspect of the new law was the establishment of family courts. Prior to these legal steps,

divorce was decided by the husband exclusively, without any involvement of his wife. Now, the husband was forced to appear in front of a court, which then determined divorce and child custody matters. Article 8 of the new law provided women with a legal venue to argue for divorce, and to protect their own interests when being divorced. The Family Protection Act curbed polygamy by requiring the consent of the first wife before a husband could marry a second. Alternatively, the husband had to prove the illness of his first wife to the court. It improved women's custody rights over their children and raised the age at which minors became legally responsible for their actions to eighteen. The conference members disagreed about how helpful the law actually was to women, with some objecting to the fact that it still operated under a religious framework. But all agreed that it was an improvement compared to the lack of legal rights that preceded it. Under the pre-Revolution civil code of Reza Shah, men could divorce women "at will, without any legal process." The speaker noted that many women received divorce papers by post, without warning. These women "would be shaking with fear when they talked about divorce," because no financial provisions were made for their well-being.

Women's participation in the Islamic revolution of 1979 was extremely high, "a result of the empowerment of women." One participant said that the revolution was the first time that women's agency was invoked in Iran, after debate she clarified that it was not the first time that such agency had existed, but the first time it was called upon by a powerful movement. The speaker argued that these female participants thought that they would have something to gain from an Islamic state, but that they were wrong. Other participants agreed that women had "helped because they were deceived." After the revolution, "when men wanted to harass or intimidate women they only had to ask for a *fatwa* (religious edict)." Ayatollah Khomeini announced in 1981 that the Family Protection Act was incompatible with *shari'ah* law, an opinion with which most conference members strongly disagreed. The act was cancelled, effectively returning the country to the time before the introduction of the Family Protection Law: men could divorce women at will; the marriage age for girls was lowered to nine years old (since raised to thirteen).

One legal exception to the worsening status of women was the special consideration given to the wives of men who died in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88 and were accorded "martyr" status. The women staged extensive protests, and only then did they receive pensions and custody rights over their children; "demands have their fruit," said the presenter. Most agreed that the rights given to the wives of "mar-

tyrs" were unlikely to be conceded to anyone else unless there was another war. There were disagreements over whether changing laws was enough to change *de facto* behavior, but the presenter argued that the laws combined with international attention would mean that "breaking the laws would harm our international reputation too much."

One way to sidestep the new strictures is to draw up a pre-nuptial agreement, but the speaker emphasized that these were not always considered binding legal documents. Girls getting married young would not always know that such documents could be drawn up, added another participant. Under current *shari'ah* law in Iran, men could hardly be forced to adhere to these pre-nuptials, even if they signed them. The group disagreed over whether wages paid women for housework upon divorce were a step forward or not. One argued that it is unacceptable to offer women financial compensation if their right to divorce is still withheld from them. Another pointed out that many "martyrs" brothers married their brothers' widows immediately so that they could receive some of their pension money. The participants agreed that it was an imperfect solution, but many seemed proud that it had no analogue in the western feminist movement.

## Session II: Marriage and Divorce Laws and Child Custody and Citizenship Laws in Iran

"*Shari'ah* law, like any other law, requires interpretation according to context," began the presenter. Some of the participants objected to accepting an Islamic framework for discussions of law, but most took a pragmatic stance. The context for *shari'ah* law in Iran is the opinions of the religious *mullahs* and is likely to stay that way for the time being. The presenter argued that Iran's post-revolutionary regime read the Family Protection Act in a misogynist context: Khomeini decided that the Family Protection Act of 1975 was "unislamic" and contrary to *shari'ah*, which led to a "wave of women" divorcing their husbands, prompting an "existential crisis" in Iran. But this reading is not the only one possible under *shari'ah* law.

The presenter indicated that under current laws there are two financial factors affecting women: galloping inflation, which renders their bride price less valuable, and compensation for housework. By the 1980s one woman quipped, "My bride price wouldn't pay for my taxi to divorce court." The bride price was later pegged to gold and thus inflation-proofed. Compensation for housework upon divorce is a

concept that has been discussed in feminist circles in the West and was made law in Iran in 1993. Wages for housework are in compliance with an Islamic principle that even those who work voluntarily have a right to be paid.

Child custody is an issue inseparable from marriage and divorce law, and participants called for a separate conference to address the rights of children in Iran. When parents are divorced, the father gets the property and in the past guaranteed custody of children when the son is over the age of two, the daughter over the age of seven (now the age for both children is seven). The physical right to beat and punish children feeds the epidemic of children, especially girls, who run away from home. Any possible reforms of laws governing the family must make concessions to *sharī'ah*, but to compromise leaves room for abuse.

During field work the presenter noted grassroots change occurring in Iran: women in both urban and rural areas are discontented. Women of all types are becoming more educated; they now make up sixty-five percent of all university students. Paradoxically, the lower the age of marriage set by the government, the later women do marry on average. Education, healthcare, and birth control have spread to the remote places in Iran. Families have become smaller in number, less patriarchal and more democratic in their functioning. Children are learning negotiation skills in the family.

Another shift is that women activists no longer work in a low-profile way, as they did before the revolution. Now they garner more respect, the Internet facilitates the spread of their ideas, and international awards have made celebrities of some of them. But there are generational divides in the movement, and heterogeneity in the religiosity of its participants.

A new problem is that to be “secular” in Iran is not to be neutral but often means to self identify as anti-religious, even for some intellectuals. And the majority of female activists identify themselves as secular. This secularism isn’t necessarily in conflict with working within the existing framework of law, but does cause tensions in the movement. Even secular feminists are careful to point out the difference between western feminists and those in Iran, “many of whose idea of equal rights isn’t supporting themselves or doing the exact same job as men for the exact same wage.”

“There is room in the *sharī'ah* for a different reading,” said the speaker. But damaging compromises that endanger the health of women and their families must not be made.

Debate followed over whether the spirit of *sharī'ah* was incompatible with feminism. One participant mentioned the debate over whether to throw out the United States constitution because it had made concessions to slavery. Frederick Douglas compellingly argued in favour of amendments to rather than destruction of the document, in order to allow its prevailing spirit to remain. Is *sharī'ah* law too historically bound to the repression of women to allow even what some secular women term as its “impulsion to freedom” to prevail? The women disagreed over whether liberalization of divorce and marriage laws was possible under a non-secular government. Those who have been in the country pointed out the difference with western feminism, that some but not all Iranian women want to support themselves like a man – not to do the same work for the same salary.

Most agreed that women had to use the given framework to make short term changes, and that the problem was “not *sharī'ah* per se but an outdated reading of it.”

### Session III: Gender Segregation in Iran

The *hijab* is shorthand for gender segregation, but forcing women to wear it is only one part of the effort to segregate women in Iran. The official reason given for the introduction of the *hijab* is so that women may not be exploited or harassed, but it is really about “protecting the man’s asset,” according to the presenter. All other forms of segregation are also based on this premise. One participant said that a “casualty” of segregation is successful marriage. “The two genders no longer know each other,” she said. “So they are like strangers, leading in many cases to divorce.”

Segregation comes in two guises: imposed from above and decided on from below. Segregation is worthwhile only when groups that share common issues decide to self-segregate, like a women’s organization or a public bath. The presenter said the separation imposed from above is comparable to apartheid in South Africa. This top-down segregation is a fact of life in Iran. Coeducational schools were shut down after the revolution. Blankets hung from the ceiling separate classrooms or mosques, dividing the space into gendered areas. Women must sit out of sight in the backs of classrooms and buses. In the past few months, a park allotted to women for cycling where they are not required to wear the *hijab* has been enclosed by a wall and guards. There are many separate elevators for women, some in government buildings. Women swim at separate

beaches from men, so that families cannot go on beach outings together.

One place where efforts at segregation have failed, at least for the time being, is in hospitals where there are simply not enough male nurses to tend to male patients.

Participants debated whether the positive educational progress of women since the Revolution is linked to gender separation. Women make up sixty-five percent of the university students and female students from conservative families attend who might not have been permitted by their families to attend had the schools been coeducational. One participant countered that while university was coeducational before the revolution, many separate schools existed. Another pointed out that women's outnumbering men in higher education and even dominance of that realm is part of a global trend that extends to non-Islamic countries. She said that it was counter-productive to link this progress to gender segregation. One participant expressed astonishment that in a country like the U.S. there was still high demand for a place like Wellesley, a female-only university. The general consensus was that both coeducational and self-segregated options should be available.

These days, women demographically dominate universities because admission to university is purely score-based. Thus, universities are among the few places where there is no discrimination, the presenter pointed out. Due to this fact, the implementation of quotas for men is already being discussed, in order to secure their presence. At the same time men in Iran seem to be in a trap: As one of the participants underlined, if a man starts his university education without a wealthy family background he will not be seen as very attractive by most of his female counterparts, due to his lack of income. If he doesn't study and starts working right away, he might marry a much better educated wife: However, the current family law still gives him the right to prevent his wife from taking a job opportunity – a fact that has been identified by some of the participants as an important source of gender problems.

#### **Session IV: International Ambitions: Iran's Current Status in Relation to the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women**

The presenter began with a rundown of some of the most important pieces of international legislation governing

women's rights. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1954 Convention on the Political Rights of Women were first steps. UN Security Council Resolution 1375 was an acknowledgement of women's crucial role in peacekeeping. The CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, is the most relevant of these steps to women in Iran according to the presenter. CEDAW provides for a committee of twenty-three rotating members who meet and evaluate the reports of member countries on the situation of women in their countries. It was the first UN protocol to classify women's rights as a human rights issue. CEDAW reports are usually issued by the government of the signatory countries, which causes problems and inaccuracies in cases like Saudi Arabia, which is also a signatory. Ninety percent of the one hundred and eighty-five countries in the UN have signed CEDAW. Of the eight countries that have not, Iran and the U.S. are two. There is a protocol by which NGOs or individuals are allowed to transmit "shadow reports," but very few countries have signed this into law. One of the counterproductive aspects of CEDAW is that the signatories are allowed to raise "reservations," identifying parts of the treaty that they will not adhere to – the most common of these is that granting citizenship generously to children born in the signatory's country. Still, spreading the word about CEDAW is one effective way to empower women, said the speaker.

What role does this sort of international agreement play in the lives of women in Muslim majority societies? None, unless they are aware that the legislation exists. In places like Saudi Arabia knowledge of what women's rights are on paper seems to be relatively low.

The participants disagreed on why Iran is not a signatory. One argued that it was better that they hadn't signed, because the document might have become mere "window dressing, as it is in Saudi Arabia." But another said that CEDAW could have been more dangerous to the regime in Iran, where the memory of a more liberal past is still alive and there is a more dynamic women's movement than in other Muslim countries. Signing CEDAW could have "opened a Pandora's box," she said. Unlike Saudi Arabia, Iran's "forte" is bottom up implementation.

There was a fierce debate at this point over whether participants were exaggerating the size or importance of the women's movement in Iran. "Why should Iran be afraid of signing something like CEDAW," asked one participant, if the government could easily repress any efforts to implement it? All laws are interpreted by religious judges, who

have the last word, said another. They would find a way to get around CEDAW. Some participants hotly disputed the idea that the movement's size or effectiveness is exaggerated, citing the million signatures movement (discussed later) and increased awareness throughout Iran. "Political will plus international pressure" is a potent combination said one. The movement arguably must be glorified, said one, so that women can take heart in a difficult situation and so that international attention can help the movement.

#### **Session V: What is the Meaning of Activism in Iran?**

The women's movement in Iran is by its nature non-hierarchical, making it difficult to estimate the number of women involved. Women participate in their own ways, including everything from traditional activism to non-conformism in their private lives. It is not a top down movement, but rather part of civil society: the activists make an effort to reach out, listen to what women want, and incorporate their demands. One participant dismissed this as a utopian phase that the movement would grow out of when it became more successful and better organized. They are establishing solidarity, which one participant compared to "group therapy for women." Another rejected this, saying that there is no pathology in the women's movement in Iran.

Although they have been accused of trying to undermine the state, feminists in Iran are not trying to "instigate a velvet revolution" in the style of ex-Soviet republics, said the presenter. Nor are they trying to overthrow the current regime – they are working in a much more pragmatic framework. But they are accused of trying to instigate a "velvet revolution" and are repressed because their strategy and organization look similar. Another new aspect of the movement is that many feminists are now combining identities, and campaign for Kurdistan or against climate change for example as well as for women's rights. They try to use their status as mothers to negotiate, most notably in the Mothers for Peace group, which has received some media attention in the West.

Regarding international support for the women's movement, the speaker stressed the importance of international awards that were given to Iranian women's rights activists. She claimed that the Olof Palme prize in 2007 given to Parvin Ardalan helped Iranian activists significantly in mobilizing and motivating other women to join the movement.

The presenter went on to compare the women's movement and its international network with labor unions in Iran. In her eyes international labor organizations were quite successful in their campaign to free Hassan Osanloo, President of the Syndicate of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company. There was nothing comparable within the international women's movement yet. This approach should be developed in order to organize and raise more attention to the situation of the women's movement in Iran.

Participants voiced various complaints about Western media coverage of Iran. Some worried that it was too cautious, because journalists were worried about not being granted visas to go back and report again. One said that the coverage was too extreme: journalists were too excited to see female lawyers in Iran, so they ignored other realities, or sometimes exaggerated stoning or other retrograde aspects of society. Even Iranians who write for Western media have this problem, because they need to impart the truth without endangering themselves by criticizing the government. Another participant blasted these writers, saying their "one commitment should be to the truth and to objectivity." Many of the participants worried about western media outlets only showing stereotypes of Iranian women in *chadors* supporting Ahmadinejad. "We don't want public opinion to see all us women as victims," said one.

Another participant told the story of being seriously beaten at a protest on International Women's Day in 2006 in Tehran – so badly that she could not walk for a year afterward.

#### **Session VI: Petitions, Campaigns, and Movements in Iran**

The one million signatures campaign is currently the largest and most internationally rooted effort by Iranian feminists. Inaugurated August 27, 2006, the effort is modeled after a similar campaign in Morocco (see below). "The Iranian government didn't know what to do when they learned about it," said the presenter. "They wanted to characterize it as a western, imperialist notion." After peaceful demonstrations were violently attacked producing minimal outcry in 2006, women's rights activists decided they needed a new strategy: outreach. The movement required not only "avant-gardes," but needed to educate ordinary women and listen to their demands. Activists trained over one thousand cadres and fanned out over the countryside to collect signatures and to discuss women's situation. This



is a big achievement given the repressive Iranian political environment that the female activists are working in. The model is secular and non-partisan, said the presenter, and makes an effort to be inclusive and multi-ethnic. They are ultimately looking for secular law in the framework of CEDAW, but are working with what they have and go so far as to quote supportive mullahs.

The one million-signature campaign is intertwined with other campaigns in Iran. They include efforts to open soccer stadiums to women, pass nationality and citizenship for the children of mixed Afghan-Iranian couples, construct or articulate a women's manifesto, and the aforementioned Mothers for Peace movement. The latter is controversial, because the group changed their name from the original "Mothers for Peace and Equality" because they thought they would be more effective if they dropped some of their demands.

So far forty-three people have been arrested for their involvement in the one million signatures campaign, under vague charges such as "working against Iranian national security." The government's strategy seemed to be to imprison younger people who might be more influenced by imprisonment "but people's responses can be unpredictable." Some activists are disheartened by imprisonment; others are hardened in their resolve. The authorities try to link the activists with the West, which makes fundraising a tricky proposition: the movement needs money, but cannot appear to be accepting it from western sources. One way around this, said the presenter, is receiving donations from private individuals. Organizers estimate that they already have 300,000 signatures but cannot be sure, because the signatures will not be gathered together until later. They estimate that the process will take longer than in Morocco because the Iranian government is more repressive, but emphasize that it is more about the conversations, the education of women in Iran and the contacts that the movement initiates than about the tallying of names. A concrete plan for the day after the collection of the millionth signature does not exist yet, admitted one of the attending activists.

As inclusive and heterogeneous as the movement is, it has faced challenges – especially tensions between religious and secular participants. One controversy within the movement concerned the tradition of *Ash-e Nazri*, i.e. cooking a broth and feeding it to the poor, often done to insure that someone recovers from sickness or is released from prison. This is a religious deed which one of the mothers of the imprisoned campaigners performed, and some secularists thought inappropriate. Participants thought that any deeper

expression of religion was not necessarily something that they would participate in, but that something so minor should not be permitted to divide the movement.

One participant said that she was "not comfortable with the movement going in this direction, speaking in a language that I don't speak." Further, she pointed to the historical experience of the Islamic Revolution when secular women joined the movement against the Shah only to be sidelined by the religious faction under the guidance of Ayatollah Khomeini after the revolution. Therefore, she was very cautious about cooperating with religious women who could take the lead away from secular women.

#### **Session VII: Breakout Discussion of Media and Where to Go from Here**

For this session participants suggested a couple of different aspects to follow up on. The majority voted for concentrating on the topic of better coverage of domestic civil society topics by western media and the issue of further western support for the women's movement from abroad.

A difference between western and Iranian media is that the latter does not have the concept of balance deeply ingrained. Iranian media are expected to take sides. Iranian journalists become too cautious and "internalize the red lines" surrounding certain topics, women's rights included. One problem with foreign journalists, according to one participant, is that they draw wide and uninformed comparisons between Iran and other Muslim countries. "Iranian women are better off than those in Saudi Arabia," these journalists conclude, ignoring the unique histories and cultures of each country. Again journalists were criticized for being too cautious to protect their visas. One western journalist pointed out that reporters are not always in control of what they cover, and that at the moment editors may want stories on the nuclear crisis, rather than human rights.

It is not just media that form a link between Iran and the West, but also culture. One German theater group was criticized for performing in Tehran, or giving an "implicit stamp of approval to the regime." But many participants thought that these cultural connections were worthwhile. "People who totally boycott the Iranian government are boycotting the Iranian people," said one. Cultural exchange on a non-state level was perceived by many participants as worthy of western institutional support.

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What is the best way to support Iranians, then, if they cannot accept funds from abroad? Activists have been imprisoned for accepting “imperialist” western money for their causes, one of the participants stated. “We are in a special global predicament without diplomatic ties.” This makes it difficult. Iran’s belligerent stance and paranoia lead the government to conclude that most aid is connected to espionage. “All we can do,” said another, “is try to normalize relations between Iran and the U.S.” Official opportunities are limited, but cultural exchanges and discussion are always possible, rather than simply sending money. A request of journalists from one of the participants was: if they go to a press conference with someone like Ahmadinejad, to reserve the first twenty-nine questions for nuclear weapons, as they inevitably will – but to ask about human rights and why the regime is arresting feminist activists with the thirtieth question.

### Session VIII: Conclusion & Participants’ Recommendations

At the end of the conference the participants had a chance to provide their feedback and suggestions for the future. The participating journalists noted that it was not only a great opportunity for building relationships, which is especially relevant for them, but also a great chance to gain insight, background information and an even better understanding of the problems. The activists and other participants also pointed out the significance of such conferences to them. They are a chance for them to meet other activists from different countries and to discuss these important issues together, to exchange information and most importantly to learn from each other’s knowledge and experience. They shared the view that fora such as these are very few and therefore very necessary.

The participants suggested differing topics for future conferences. The first concerns children’s rights in Iran, including problems of education, citizenship, and violence against children and also their future in Iran. The future is also an element in another suggested topic: Iranian youth and its perspectives.

Sociological changes in Iran inside and outside the family and the implications these have for women and their status in Iran are other relevant issues. This could touch on elements concerning social structure, women’s education, quotas, economic and political participation; reform of Islam the advancements and achievements of women but also the problems caused by these changes. ■

### Executive Summary

From November 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> the Aspen Institute Germany held its ninth conference in the series of events on Iranian civil society that was initiated in 2007. The conference’s goal was to provide a platform for dialogue and networking among Iranian bloggers, journalists, scholars and activists, both from Iran and abroad as well as for Europeans and Americans dealing with Iran, thereby advancing the development of civil society in Iran. It brought together approximately twenty-five individuals, among them journalists, artists, and scholars, including three in-country participants. Some of them had attended events at the Aspen Institute before.

The conference was divided into six panels, each of which started with a presentation by distinguished speakers, followed by an open discussion. Although a broad variety of topics was discussed, a number of questions were brought up frequently:

- How is media usage changing in Iran and what is the role of new digital media?
- What specific challenges do critical Iranian journalists face and how do they cope with them?
- How can individuals and organizations from abroad assist them in doing so?

Participants also expressed strongly differing views on many issues, but a number of points came up repeatedly. The most important can be summed up as follows.

- Every type of research on social and political issues, such as media in Iran, faces a number of practical problems. In addition to all of the general problems of quantitative social science research, the political situation in Iran makes research on a number of topics almost impossible. Consequently, figures are often unreliable; over the course of the conference their validity and correct interpretation was often the subject of intense controversy. In short, all data emanating from inside Iran must be taken with great caution.
- Censorship in Iran is not only pervasive but also highly incoherent and unpredictable. This became clear not only during the panel devoted to censorship, but throughout the conference in various anecdotal accounts of personal experiences. Due to the ambiguous nature of the Iranian constitution and the strong institutional fragmentation of the authorities involved, censorship can

vary greatly in intensity. Although new digital media offer some ways to circumvent censorship, they are by no means immune to the imposition of restrictions.

- Although Iranian journalists critical of the incumbent government and Iranian activists appreciate support from outside, there are no clear recipes for benevolent Westerners or Diaspora Iranians on how to help. Which measures taken are helpful and which are counterproductive and sometimes dangerous, were the subjects of intense controversy. Fundamental cultural and historical understanding of Iran and its society is a major asset in any kind of foreign cooperation.

### Session I: Media Coverage in Iran

The speaker, a media researcher who is currently writing on alternative media usage in Iran, started by giving a general overview of different types of media and their relevance in Iran. His findings can be summed up and structured as follows:

*Radio* broadcasting, which was launched in Iran in 1941 with a public station that was supposed to emulate the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), still has a huge audience, but its political relevance is questionable. Radio stations in Iran (thirteen nationwide stations, three entirely *Quran* related, plus approximately thirty provincial ones), are heavily censored and not seen by Iranians as reliable sources of information. In radio, the presence of stations broadcasting from abroad is significant with more than seventy stations on the air. The relevance and potential of these stations were discussed in session four.

National *television* (IRIB), which started in Iran in 1967, today is, as in most other countries, arguably the most important form of news media, reaching eighty to eighty-five percent of the population. Today there are twenty provincial and seven national stations (up from two stations in 1998), all controlled by the state. As it is heavily censored, most people do not see television as a reliable news source and consume it mostly for reasons of entertainment; however, as a number of participants pointed out later, this is all but politically irrelevant (see session five). Entertainment formats, such as soap operas, are used as a means of transmitting messages, especially regarding family values and public morals. Satellite television from abroad is obviously common, with more than 40 existing stations and an esti-

mated 50% of the population in big cities having access. But since receiving these kinds of programs is illegal, no comprehensive study of use, content or relevance exists.

The Iranian *press* is still remarkably diverse with more than two thousand papers being published, fourteen of which are national dailies. The latter, which have a combined circulation of 1,800,000, are censored rigorously. Regional, weekly and monthly papers enjoy somewhat more freedom, but are particularly vulnerable to unpredictable censorship (see also session two), with papers often being banned, re-admitted and banned again. Generally, the importance of the press for shaping political information and discourse seems to be in decline since the 1980's. Readers today tend not to trust information in papers and often read it for rather apolitical reasons.

Although Iranian *cinema* is quite successful internationally, its political relevance at home has been in decline since the 1970s. Official figures show approximately three hundred movie theatres in all of Iran. About fifty films are produced in Iran each year with each citizen making on average one to three annual cinema visits. Although independent, political filmmakers still exist in Iran, most of their work can only be seen at international film festivals abroad.

*The Internet* (which became available in Iran in 1996) and its use are particularly difficult to study and all statistics are considered vague, at best. It is estimated that twenty to twenty-five percent of the population uses the Internet, predominantly in urban areas. Censorship is prevalent in this field too with more than five million websites being permanently banned for various reasons (pornography, politics etc.). Weblogs are a relatively young phenomenon but have gained a lot of attention since their introduction to Iran in the year 2000. There are one and a half million Farsi blogs, one of the highest numbers in the world. It is quite unknown how many of them are strictly politically-orientated. Access to many of the political and reform-related blogs is blocked in Iran.

In the discussion, some participants questioned the validity of parts of the data presented. The number of women using and producing new digital media was debated. Whereas the speaker had said that new digital media are still used and produced mostly by men, other participants pointed out a high number of women – up to fifty percent in total – using and producing digital media. Some participants estimated that the number of films produced each year is higher, due to the size of the underground sphere.

The Berkman Center for Internet & Society's Internet & Democracy project at Harvard University released a major study on "Mapping Iran's Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere"<sup>2</sup> in April 2008, which was cited as an alternative source of information; although its content was also questioned by some participants, especially its way of categorizing blogs and its subsequent estimate that there is a very high number of conservative blogs. Participants agreed on the difficulty of obtaining any reliable data on a politically delicate subject such as media usage in Iran due to the political situation.

On the question of the political potential of new digital media the view prevailed that blogs permitted the spread of information that is otherwise censored in other, more state-controlled media. On the other hand, the impossibility of verifying most of this information makes blogs a problematic news source, especially for media outlets abroad. Furthermore, publishing censored information through blogs still comes with serious risk for those who do so, and Iranian authorities are eager to link the use of the Internet, and of blogging in public opinion with foreign influence and with attempts to organize a "velvet revolution" in Iran.

## Session II: Censorship of Media and the Working Environment for Journalists and Bloggers

The speaker, an Iranian filmmaker living in Europe, described censorship in Iran as omnipresent and devastating in effect. Fear of censorship and consequent prosecution puts enormous pressure on all journalists, writers and artists. Most importantly, censorship is being internalized; anticipating censorship, people censor their own works and speech. The awareness of the constant threat of censorship leads to permanent "double-speak" and finally "double-think": "you'd better not say publicly what you think privately."

A very important characteristic of Iranian censorship is its incoherence and unpredictability. Whereas in other authoritarian regimes there are clear-cut red lines that everyone is aware of (the speaker mentioned the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as an example), the situation in Iran is much more complicated. Although touching upon certain topics is often cited as reason for censorship (Islam, national security, the political system of *velayat-e faqih*) it is by no means obvious which statements exactly cross the red lines.

Nowadays, the era of President Mohammad Khātāmī (1997-2005) is often seen as a golden age of relative freedom in journalism and the arts. However, the speaker pointed out, this is only partially true. Censorship was prevalent under Khātāmī too, albeit with subtle differences. Censors were renamed "advisors" but continued to exert significant influence on journalists and artists. While in the early years of Khātāmī's presidency greater freedom of expression did indeed exist, in later years conservative forces intensified their efforts to keep control over journalistic and artistic expression.

Since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, Iran has seen a further conservative backlash. More conservative and religious censors have been appointed.

Other participants generally agreed with most of the statements made by the speaker, and contributed personal anecdotes about their experience with censorship in Iran. The causes of the described inconsistency were discussed. Two main reasons were given:

- First, the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is ambiguous in character, referring both to human rights including freedom of expression on the one and to *sharī'ah* law and *velayat-e faqih* on the other hand. Thus, there is an inherent contradiction in the legal system.
- Second, and more importantly, there is massive fragmentation on the administrative level. Participants named no fewer than five different authorities that are officially involved in censorship (Office of the Supreme Leader, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ministry of Information & Communications Technology, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Intelligence) to which unofficial pressure groups, such as irregular paramilitary units, e.g. *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, must also be added. As these administrative bodies are controlled by different, sometimes competing, factions, their policies on censorship are inconsistent and sometimes in direct conflict with each other. Although the Office of the Supreme Leader in theory is the most powerful institution, in practice there is often no clear hierarchy between these institutions.

The other main issue discussed during this session was how journalists, bloggers and artists can successfully circumvent or even fight censorship. Everyone who is publishing anything in Iran is highly aware of censorship and its potentially grave consequences. This has led to elaborate and subtle ways of expression, for example the use of

<sup>2</sup>[http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/newsroom/Mapping\\_Irans\\_Online\\_Public](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/newsroom/Mapping_Irans_Online_Public)

metaphors (animals instead of people) to describe political situations.

Censors, however, have adapted to this use of metaphors. For example a documentary about the possibility of an earthquake in Tehran was seen as a metaphor for social unrest.

The question of how censorship can be challenged within the Iranian judicial system was raised but remained mostly unanswered. Ways to do so exist in theory, but are of little practical relevance. One blogger, who is based outside Iran, reported that after his weblog was blocked by the government he called on his readers to contact the Ministry of Information to ask why his weblog was blocked. A couple of days later he received a call from the ministry; they offered to open his website for Iranians again if he would immediately stop pushing people to go after them. His personal conclusion can be summarized: don't give up from the very beginning! Be creative and stand united.

In conclusion, censorship is an omnipresent threat to journalists, writers, artists and activists in Iran. No easy ways to avoid it exist and its potential consequences put enormous personal pressure on people. Digital media have offered some means by which to avoid censorship but are not immune to it.

### **Session III: Foreign Journalism in Iran and Iranian Journalists Abroad**

Due to an incident in Tehran, an invited German correspondent based in Iran was not able to join the conference and give his presentation. Therefore, the remaining speaker, an Iranian journalist with experience living and working abroad, portrayed only the difficulties facing Iranian journalists working outside of Iran.

Iranian journalists living and working abroad face permanent restrictions on their work from two sides: On the one hand, they have to deal with often tough visa restrictions in their host countries, making working and earning money difficult. In addition, they often encounter arrogance and suspicion from western partners or potential employers doubting their professional standards.

In Iran their activity raises suspicions of cooperation with foreign countries, which can lead to legal prosecution upon their return. If they want to keep the option of returning to

Iran open, they need to consider the potential consequences of their journalistic coverage particularly closely. As an example of the level of governmental sensitivities the speaker explained the case of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR). IWPR's Mianeh dialogue project planned to bring ten Iranian journalists to the United States to cover the U.S. presidential elections in mid-October. This trip was temporarily suspended after the group was prevented from leaving Tehran, even though the visit and the detailed itinerary in the United States were planned in direct communication with the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

In general, Iranian newspapers are very interested in any story from abroad which discredits western countries as role models for democracy and the rule of law. Corruption, abuse of position or other governmental misbehavior are priority topics in this context.

How this group of people can be helped effectively remained unclear. On the micro-level, their cooperation partners in western countries have some opportunities to assist them but the fundamental political dilemmas affecting their work are likely to persist.

On the other hand, the work of foreign journalists in Iran comes with its own problems. Although they are mostly safe from individual prosecution in Iran, their work is permanently challenged through restrictions on research activities and reluctance on the part of many people to talk to them for fear of political consequences. At the same time, their editors in Europe or America offer them very limited space and often demand only stories on the current "hot topics" (e.g. the nuclear program). Although these problems have less grave personal consequences for the individuals concerned, their work can suffer severely, perpetuating a superficial view of the complex social realities in Iran. In this context, the responsibility of news editors in Europe and America was stressed explicitly.

### **Session IV: Broadcasting to Iran What Mission?**

The session was introduced by two speakers, representing Radio Farda and Radio Zamaneh, who presented their work and the operating concept of their respective institutions.

Radio Farda, which is essentially an American project in the tradition of Radio Liberty, started broadcasting ten years ago. Although it is financed by the U.S. Congress,



the speaker stressed that its mission is not “to tell the American story”, but to provide “free media in an un-free society”. In its early years, most of its programming was produced by Radio Liberty, but now Radio Farda is able to produce its programming entirely on its own. Statistics regarding Farda’s actual influence are not very reliable but an estimated thirteen percent of the population listens to Radio Farda at least occasionally. Their website is blocked in Iran but nonetheless is accessible and is viewed 3.7 million times a month from Iran. Furthermore, Radio Farda operates a well-functioning SMS-service for its listeners, which results in more than five hundred short text messages from mobile phone users inside Iran per month. Contact numbers of Radio Farda are announced on a regular basis throughout its programs. This way news stories and other information can be shared by Iranian citizens with journalists abroad within seconds. Farda’s journalistic work faces a number of difficulties. Their reporters are the target of prosecution in Iran and they have great difficulties verifying information from Iran. Radio Farda plans to expand its programs, especially via satellite radio, but funding for those projects is not yet certain.

Radio Zamaneh, on the other hand, is based in the Netherlands and owes its existence to the initiative of Farah Karimi, a Dutch member of parliament in 2006. It was originally conceived as a television station but pressure from Iran, which threatened to cut official, diplomatic relations led to the cancellation of this plan. Its funds are approved until 2010, future funding is uncertain. The speaker stressed that Radio Zamaneh is truly independent and has no political agenda or ties to opposition groups but focuses on long-term social and cultural transformation. Zamaneh employs approximately two hundred freelance journalists and is in direct touch with more than three hundred bloggers in Iran, building on their experience and knowledge. Radio Zamaneh is dedicated to political neutrality, which sometimes includes letting Iranian government officials present their side of a story. The speaker further pointed to Radio Zamaneh’s special dynamic relationship with its audience, not only allowing users to give feedback but also providing links to their sites. Figures on the number of satellite radio listeners do not exist.

Panelists were generally sympathetic with both station’s missions but expressed great skepticism about their actual chance of achieving transformation in Iran. Their mission, and yet at the same time their dilemma, is having to produce a program abroad whose content is relevant for Iranian everyday life, a hugely difficult task. Nevertheless, participants from Iran reported that foreign media have a major influence on Iran’s political elite. Topics and discus-

sions covered by VOA, Radio Farda, Radio Zamaneh, the BBC Persian Service and others are studied in-depth by Iranian parliamentarians, governmental officials and politically active clerics in Tehran.

Several panelists pointed out that in order to reach a truly broad audience it is absolutely necessary to broadcast on FM; both speakers said this is technically impossible as it would require broadcasting within Iran, and hence licenses from the Iranian government. On the positive side, Iranian panelists said that most Iranians trust foreign stations more than any Iranian ones despite efforts in the state media to discredit them as agents of foreign powers.

The question of the regional distribution of both station’s listeners was raised but could not be answered due to a lack of statistics. It is assumed that most of their listeners live in big cities rather than in the countryside.

## **Session V: IRIB – Between Modernity and Red Lines**

The next speaker gave a comprehensive overview of the history of *Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting* (IRIB), called National Iranian Radio and Television until the Islamic revolution of 1979, and its current structure and mission statement.

IRIB was founded shortly after the Islamic revolution, its services were greatly expanded later; today, it comprises seven national channels plus a number of regional ones. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini recognized the importance of modern mass media for influencing the population saying that “television is a university”. Since Khomeini’s death, the head of the IRIB has been directly appointed by the supreme leader. Most important positions within IRIB are political appointments, not based on qualifications, resulting in a lack of qualified journalists especially in the higher ranks, which are mostly held by former commanders of the revolutionary guards. The current head of IRIB for example is known to have participated in the hostage taking in the American embassy in 1979; his political positions are unclear and he does not clearly belong to any political camp. Recently, IRIB has seen some efforts aimed at commercialization, e.g. the commencement of commercial advertising in 1996.

Not surprisingly, IRIB’s program is heavily censored and generally in line with government policy with barely any leeway for dissent. Since most people are aware of the bi-

ased nature of its coverage, which often entirely ignores pressing social issues, and hence mistrust their news formats, IRIB has intensified its efforts to influence public opinion through entertainment formats. Television dramas and soap operas advertise virtuous behavior and often present evil characters as agents of western powers. Contemporary social problems like drug addiction or AIDS do appear in such formats but are often presented as consequences of a decadent western life-style.

Although IRIB has its own, different programming for Iranians abroad, its influence among Diaspora Iranians is generally considered minimal.

In the ensuing discussion, more examples of censorship and political indoctrination were given; some participants described IRIB's programming as "brain-washing". The opaque financial connections of IRIB and widespread corruption and nepotism were also mentioned. Some speakers pointed out that IRIB is still driven by an understanding of television's social role that is rooted in the 1960s and vastly overestimates its influence and is relatively unsophisticated in its methods of indoctrination.

Others hinted at the fact that many progressive people also work for IRIB for lack of other employment opportunities making their fiction program less homogenous than presented. They gave examples of television dramas containing surprisingly progressive portrayals of female characters. This view was clearly rejected by others, especially participants from Iran, insisting that on IRIB's program, the final moral of fictional stories always confirms conservative views.

In conclusion, IRIB will continue to exist in its current form as a politically-controlled broadcasting station. Change will not likely come unless there is a fundamental political shift in Iran.

## Session VI: International Solidarity – What Can Be Done?

The session was initiated by three speakers representing two organizations from Europe and the United States that are dedicated to supporting journalists and civil society abroad. Both offer help to journalists and bloggers threatened by prosecution. Possible measures include financial support to pay for legal defense and providing secure Internet access. Furthermore, they offer services such as the translation of blogs, media training and support in building

international cooperation and networking. They have had a substantial role in the creation of a number of grassroots initiatives in Iran lately.

The speakers and participants stressed the dangers of such work for people in Iran if their cooperation with foreign organizations becomes public. Everyone offering such services must be highly aware of the potential consequences and act accordingly, i.e. not make their cooperation public.

When asked what would help their current work most, participants named various points:

- No threat of war
- Reliable news sources for activists
- Iranian bloggers should know that outside organizations can help them
- A union for independent journalists in Iran is absolutely needed
- The West needs to be more careful in helping, as at times its actions can make things worse
- Foreign funding is needed, but dangerous for people inside Iran
- Be aware of the situation in the country, and help with the local context; be very cautious
- Media training: professional training, there is a lack of independent Iranian news agencies
- Create & improve ways for journalists to carry their news to the outside world
- Bring news to those who don't have access to the internet inside Iran

Regarding the last point, one of the speakers shared information on a Wikipedia Persian-DVD, which has been produced and distributed by a Western NGO amongst Iranians living in the countryside with huge success. The following debate on media training was particularly controversial: Whereas some participants called it necessary and said that many Iranian journalists lack professional standards, others rejected this as an expression of western arrogance.

In conclusion, regarding the situation of digital media and journalism in Iran the participants repeatedly emphasized four points and partly disagreed on them.

First, one speaker underlined the need for well-educated journalists who can provide unbiased and objective journalism in Iran. Another speaker latched onto this point in order to urge more technical support for bloggers and journalists in Iran. Whereas, another participant argued that support for established media outlets like BBC and

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Deutsche Welle would be more efficient. Generally, the journalists condemned reporting that simply followed the political interests of a particular country.

Second, transparency was seen as an important enabler of mutual trust at the government level.

Third, it is easier for Iranians to take part in conferences organized by universities. Universities are perceived as a neutral place with no interests.

Fourth, the suggestion was to stay connected on an internet portal. The situation for journalists, bloggers and human rights activists can be easily supported by a network which should be available in Persian and English. All participants agreed that international solidarity despite domestic intimidation of Iranians is vital. ■

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# ASPEN SYRIA CIVIL SOCIETY PROGRAM

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**Senior Program Officer: Eva Dingel**

**The situation of civil society and the political opposition in the Syrian Arab Republic is complex. The population, for one, still needs to gain an understanding of the legitimate, positive contribution that civil society organizations can make to open societies.**

**Civil society organizations in Syria operate against the backdrop of a state of emergency that has been in force since 1963. The state of emergency was introduced by the Syrian military and is of questionable legitimacy since it was approved neither by the Syrian parliament nor by the Syrian civilian government of the time. Syrian authorities justify the continued state of emergency with the security threat that they perceive as emanating from Israel.**

**Because of the Syrian authorities' security mentality, the government tends to suspect non-governmental organizations of constituting a potential fifth column within the country. And because there is no adequate legal basis for civil society organizations in Syria, most civil society organizations operate there illegally or in a legal grey zone, with limited rights. Civil society organizations with less political agendas face fewer restrictions in operating in this twilight zone. In other cases, however, the government can go as far as trying to drown out civil society activism by creating rival organizations of its own. Even organizations enjoying quasi-governmental sponsorship can still face significant bureaucratic obstacles due to the prevailing security mentality.**

Syrian civil society organizations themselves are beset by their own, serious, internal challenges. At the most general level, they tend to lack well-articulated missions and operating concepts. They can, instead, be quite opportunistic and liquidity-driven – adapting their mission and concept to suit the particular topic in vogue with funding organizations.

Due, in part, to the lack of an adequate legal basis for their operation, Syrian civil society organizations have significant room for improvement in terms of their accountability both to their funders, to their constituencies and in terms of building democratic internal structures that would provide them with greater credibility among a skeptical general population.

In addition to the above, there has been a proliferation in Syria of mono-ethnic non-governmental organizations seeking to advance or protect the rights of one ethnic group seemingly to the exclusion or even at the expense of other ethnic groups. This does further damage to the credibility of civil society as a whole in the country.

This development contributes to a fundamental weakness faced by civil society in Syria that can also be observed elsewhere in the Arab world, and beyond: a lack of cooperation, coordination and solidarity. Without it civil society stands little chance of using cohesive arguments and pressure to convince government to implement change.

Despite all of these issues, a minimal level of international cooperation with civil society organizations in Syria exists and is possible. Women's organizations, human rights activists, and journalists are in particular need of support and topics such as constitutional reform, human rights, detention, and international cooperation are those that are reported to be foremost in their minds.

It is for this reason that Aspen's Syria Civil Society Program was launched in 2005 to focus on strengthening civil society inside the country. For the past four years Aspen and its partners have organized a series of conferences in different locations throughout the Middle East and Europe. Aspen has invited leaders of civil society, policy makers, business people and media representatives to discuss issues such as economic prospects, human rights, democratic development and free media at small informal meetings on a regular basis. Aspen aims to improve mutual understanding, educate one another on current developments, and ensure continuing communication despite international political tensions. By bringing together policy makers with representatives of civil society and the private sector Aspen also aims to learn about social and political developments in the

region and promote a continuing open dialogue between the Middle East, Europe and America.

The discussions that have taken place to date have centered on how to obtain resources and organize in order to advance freedom of expression, democracy and the rule of law in Syria.

The opportunity that new media offer to bring alternative sources of information into relatively closed societies was one area of focus of the various exchanges described in detail below. Given the high levels of illiteracy in Syria, such vehicles will – at best – reach a limited subset of the Syrian population and cannot be thought of as a means of mass communication. Television and radio will still remain the most effective media for this purpose. Notwithstanding all of their known shortcomings, new Arab television media, such as *Al-Jazeera*, may offer a better platform by which to build trust and raise awareness of the potential positive contributions of civil society in the Arab world. These channels sometimes report on conferences and seminars organized by Arab civil society organizations.

Efforts to advance democracy in Syria are hampered in the first order by lack of credibility on the part of protagonists structured on an ethnically exclusionary basis and lacking adequate internal democracy. Somewhat as economic stagnation discredited democratization in the Russian Federation in the 1990s and discredited a similar wave of democratization that took place in South and Central America in the 1980s and 1990s, the spread of violence in Iraq initially caused Syrians to pull back and support the incumbent authoritarian regime, rather than push actively for change and greater democratic participation. It remains to be seen how this attitude will develop, now that the situation in neighboring Iraq is stabilizing, a democratic regime has taken root in Iraq and the withdrawal of significant numbers of foreign forces is within sight.

The topic of foreign funding of civil society organizations in the Middle East and North Africa was actively discussed in the various meetings that were convened. In Syria, the government accuses those who accept foreign funding of being "foreign agents". As a result, civil society organizations in Syria endanger their work, their livelihood and the credibility of civil society in the country as a whole if they accept foreign funds. On the other hand it was difficult for participants to imagine how indigenous civil society can convince an entrenched authoritarian regime with a marked zero-sum mentality to undertake greater reform without drawing on international assistance in their efforts.



**Syria Roundtable**  
**London, January 24-26, 2007**

This strategy meeting brought a small group of U.S. and European Near East experts and journalists together with a select number of opinion leaders from Syrian and Arab civil society. The substantive content of the meeting was a general analysis of the Middle East and North Africa region. Besides upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Syria, subjects such as the increased U.S. military presence in Iraq, the prospects for the democracy movement in Lebanon and the possible Near East policy of President Sarkozy were discussed. Despite strong U.S. efforts to strengthen democracy and rule of law in the Middle East and North Africa, the participants agreed that the region is characterized by significant instability, whose roots reach far back into the 20th and 19th centuries. ■

**Syria Practitioners' Workshop**  
**Berlin, February 21-23, 2007**

This three-day conference, which was combined with a “practitioners’ workshop” – an exchange between Western NGOs who cooperate together with Syrian civil society on a wide range of subject areas – brought twenty-eight participants from the U.S., Europe, and Syria together. The first part of the practitioners’ workshop, involved a detailed discussion of experiences and evaluations of the current condition of Syrian civil society. Despite the restrictive attitude of the Syrian government towards its political opposition and civil society, a number of NGO representatives were able to report that a minimal level of cooperation was still possible with activists within Syria. Projects with women’s organizations, journalists, and human rights attorneys are in particular need of foreign assistance.

In the second part of the round table conference, fifteen additional Syrians joined the participants. A detailed analysis of the current state of civil society in Syria and the expectations of the forthcoming parliamentary elections were the focus of the further three rounds of discussion that took place. With the help of an expert from the Council on Foreign Relations it was possible clearly to discern the strategy adopted by Syrian president Assad and how the opposition should position itself in response in order to minimize its exposure. The total number of participants was twenty-eight. Due to travel restrictions imposed by the Syrian government, no activists originating in Syria were able to participate. ■

## Syria Roundtable Istanbul, May 14-16, 2007

### Summary

This conference hosted more Syrians from the region than any other held so far by the Aspen Institute. Twenty-one Syrians traveled from Syria to participate; among them were a number of lawyers, political activists and human rights organization leaders. The majority of participants belonged to ethnic minorities; mainly Kurds but also Assyrians and Druze. There were also six exile Syrians from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bulgaria and Belgium and representatives from Amnesty International, the Free University Berlin, the Helsinki Federation, TÜSIAD, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Forum, and Human Rights First. The agenda, which had been suggested by the Syrian participants beforehand, concerned the human rights situation in Syria, detentions, constitutional issues, and how to connect various organizations with activists.

Aspen experienced a number of difficulties with regards to the communication format. Translation was not a problem; however a relative lack of political maturity was evident throughout all the sessions. Most of the Syrian participants came with prepared statements regarding atrocities committed by the Syrian regime. While Aspen and the other western NGO participants were interested in this information, Aspen, as facilitator, found it very difficult to move the Syrians into a mature discussion. Instead of reporting on each session, the following report is divided into recurring themes presented and sometimes disagreed upon by the Syrians. The statements given revealed a number of disagreements among the Syrian participants, but there were also a few concrete suggestions made – they will be discussed below.

### Problems

One particular participant of this conference made a scene during the second day, saying that he was unaware that the conference was run by a U.S.-sponsored NGO and then excused himself from the conference. However, he participated in the last day of the conference.

Another problem was the use of one point of contact for identifying possible Syrian participants. The result was a lack of diversity of Syrian participants and an inability to control who was participating. There were a few participants who ‘replaced’ registered participants, who had been banned from traveling, at the last minute.

Recurring themes:

1. Democratic Development
2. Emergency Rule’ and Other Legal Issues for Oppression
3. Role and Multiplication of Human Rights Organizations
4. Funding
5. Elections
6. Minorities
7. Israel

### Democratic Development

The topic of democratic development was covered in both subtle and overt ways. The difficulty in working in an environment like Syria was evident in these discussions. The Syrian participants, as a whole, failed to develop their ideologies into methods or even a detailed discussion. It seemed that the lack of experience in regard to democratic state structures, pluralism, freedom of speech and freedom of information made it nearly impossible to explore the potential for democratic reforms inside Syria with participants.

Therefore many of the comments made about democratic development, by the Syrian participants, focused on the fear of invasion or the use of force by the United States. They also reiterated their lack of trust in the West – citing the current situation in Iraq – and asked repeatedly what the West’s interests are in the Middle East and in Syria. The Syrian participants repeated that they need ‘support’ and ‘training’ but very few suggestions were made as to specifics.

## Emergency Rule and Other Legal Issues

Due to the large number of participants with legal backgrounds, many were very well informed as to the problems relating to democratic development and human rights protection within the Syrian constitution itself.

Many of the participants cited the use of emergency rule as a reason for many Syrian laws. Since 1963, the use of this rule has given power and protection to an authoritarian government and allowed it to enforce laws prohibiting opposition parties, punishing alleged ‘weakening of national sentiment,’ allowing the use of torture, and action against ethnic and religious minorities. Many Syrian participants gave detailed accounts of the relevant constitutional articles and the history of such strife. According to one NGO representative, the long-term effect of this system has been almost to eliminate the right to self-determination in Syria leading, to unrest especially amongst minorities.

## Role and Multiplication of Human Rights Organizations

One of the criticisms of the proliferation of human rights organizations in Syria is that they are ethnically oriented. The exclusionary nature of these human rights organizations signifies that some of these organizations are more politically motivated than concerned about universal human rights. According to one Syrian opposition member, ‘We all want to be leaders.’

Mixing the façade of a human rights organization with a politically motivated group, especially one that calls for regime change in Syria, can be dangerous. The recognition of human rights should be universal, and according to the Helsinki Federation, fighting for the rights of one group to the exclusion of another group because of political, historical, or ethnic differences is detrimental to all human rights organizations. Since Syria’s ruling party consistently labels oppositionists as ‘state terrorists,’ the mixing of oppositionists and human rights groups could possibly lead to negative consequences for genuine human rights activists.

## Funding

The Syrian participants emphasized the need for foreign funding for Syria’s struggling civil society, but were slow to describe exactly for what purpose, when, and how this kind of support would be used.

Some asked for basic training in organizational skills, public relations, and information technology. When People In Need and Amnesty International offered assistance with organizational skills and public awareness of human rights violations, there was almost no visible reaction, either out of fear or lack of interest. A few participants called for ‘unconditional support’ from Westerners, namely Europeans.

## Elections

The consensus regarding elections was that they are neither free nor fair. The Syrian participants referenced them as ‘theater’ and as simply a ‘referendum.’ No concrete suggestions were made.

## Minorities

There was an overwhelming number of Kurdish participants at the conference. The role of minorities in Syria is important both for opposition groups and for human rights groups. The conference, as stated earlier, over-represented the Kurdish minority and the discussion of minorities was therefore somewhat one-sided.

## Israel

The Syrian participants were concerned about the Israeli and American funding of CSOs. The implications for the safety of Middle Eastern activists are still uncertain; however the concern from the Syrians was consistent.

In addition, many of the Syrians debated the role of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the problems of Syria. Some held the opinion that no democratic changes could occur in Syria without a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Others argued that the ‘Israeli threat’ and the territorial debates are tools used by the regime to justify emergency rule.

## Syria Roundtable, Amman November, 21-23, 2007

### Ideas/Concrete Suggestions

1. Foreign funding
2. Technical training
3. Rehabilitation programs for former detainees
4. Defending those accused in court
5. Children's programs for orphans or children of minorities (without citizenship)
6. Assistance for people with disabilities
7. Internet security training
8. Amnesty International asked for reports on human rights violations
9. Independent coordination office for Syria's opposition
10. Common website for Syria's opposition ■

### Executive Summary

The Aspen Institute chose the theme of NGO's participation in the reform process in the Arab world for this meeting held in cooperation with the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS). Aspen gathered activists from around the Muslim world in Amman, Jordan. The majority of the participants were Syrian, but a diverse group of participants was necessary in order to avoid unwanted attention. By ensuring that the majority of the participants were Syrian, the conference discussions remained focused on Syrian civil society but the Syrian participants were also able to learn from the experience of activists in other countries. Representation from the broader Middle East allowed the Syrians to build relationships for future cooperative endeavors. The lack of coordination and cooperation was a frequent topic of discussion during the conference, and it was also repeatedly pointed out that this deficiency in cooperation constitutes one of the fundamental weaknesses of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Arab world.

### Session I: Civil Society in the Arab World – An Evaluation

After introductions, the first session was devoted to fundamental questions regarding the definition of civil society and its current position in the Arab world. The participants raised many points explaining why CSOs are not influential. The lack of coordination and cooperation among different organizations on the national and international level was repeatedly criticized. One Jordanian participant spoke about the lack of support and solidarity when her organization was excluded from observing elections. Without cooperation between CSOs, there is no chance of applying pressure on governments in order to provoke change or revision of decisions.

The reason for this weakness lies in the failure of some organizations to be transparent. For example, there are NGOs that are financed and supported by the regime, and the lack of transparency makes it difficult to distinguish between those organizations that are independent and those that are dependent upon the regime's funding. Along the same lines, one should consider the groups organized by the 'First Ladies' of each respective country. Can these groups be considered part of civil society or are they simply a component of the authoritarian system? Further, can organizations that only criticize the government be regarded as

CSOs or does this term also apply to groups that are merely engaged in charitable activities?

Further problems are caused by the lack of well thought-out concepts and missions. Individual organizations orient themselves more towards available funds than towards a general goal or concept; strategies are not built on vision but on funding prospects. Consequently, some CSOs shift their focus from youth assistance to women's rights issues simply because the funding providers have more resources for these particular projects. This damages the development of a long-term and sustainable strategy and leads to competitive relationships between the already few civil society organizations.

The Syrian participants underscored that, first and foremost, their work lacks legal protection. They have fundamental problems in that most of their organizations are not accredited by the government and cannot be registered. For this reason the organizations and their staff operate illegally and can claim no rights within the Syrian system.

### **Session II: Human Rights and Reform of the Legal System**

The second session was devoted to the legal difficulties that CSOs experience. The restrictive regulations in Syria are based on the prevailing emergency rule legislation. Enacted in 1963, this law still applies today. The Syrian participants emphasized that no emergency exists to justify this legislation. The regime continues emergency rule under the pretence of an impending threat from Israel. Furthermore, the Syrian participants explained, the emergency rule legislation is illegal since it was not confirmed by parliament or the governmental administration. Instead, it was instigated and implemented by the military leadership.

The question of funding by foreign organization or governments was also discussed. Supporters suggested that the government itself works in certain areas with foreign governments or institutions. Why should CSOs refuse external funding and support? Organizations and individuals must remember that even if foreign funders have their own interests, the funding can still be used to the organizations' advantage. It was also remarked that a authoritarian regime cannot be changed without foreign aid. On the other hand, those against foreign funding mentioned that CSOs make themselves vulnerable when they accept foreign money. It is more important to remain transparent.

There was wide agreement that authoritarian regimes would not easily loosen their hold on power. Without active opposition movements and civil society organizations, there can be no reform. For this purpose, the population needs to understand the meaning of civil society and have an awareness of it. Only when they believe in the success of CSOs will they be ready to support CSOs. However, even though a large part of the population doesn't believe that change in the status quo is possible, individual interest groups still try to extract governmental concessions through strikes or demonstrations.

### **Session III: Human Rights Violations Monitoring & Election Monitoring**

Due to the enormous desire to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of foreign funding, the topic of this session was modified to focus more on general concerns of CSOs in the Muslim world. The contributions to the previous session made it clear that CSOs in each country begin their work from different points of departure. State financial support is found in a few cases. Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq experience few problems accepting funding and support from foreign institutions.

In these countries, numerous CSOs focused on social and environmental topics have evolved. However in Syria, CSOs risk endangering their work and their livelihood by accepting foreign funds.

The registration and accreditation process of the organizations in most Middle Eastern countries is cumbersome. Organizations working with less political topics, such as child welfare, anticipate fewer restrictions than those working with politically sensitive topics, such as election monitoring or political imprisonment.

One Syrian participant described her attempt to register a women's rights organization. It became clear to her that the registration process was un-transparent and arbitrary. There were no fewer than six ministers and seven security agency representatives, including the Air Force Security Agency, working on her application.

From the participants' perspective, CSOs need to win the recognition of the population and not just of the government. CSOs must build trust so that, for example, family members of political prisoners can approach appropriate organizations. The same is true for violations by the state.



If a CSO is not trustworthy, people will not report individual cases of encroachment or wrongdoing for fear of creating more problems.

#### **Session IV: Problems of “Good Governance” in the Arab World**

This session began with a report on the situation of detainees and the use of torture in the Arab world. Torture is reportedly still widespread in Arab countries, even in moderate and pro-western countries. None of the countries’ prisons are monitored, despite the fact that all countries have signed declarations allowing monitoring. In fact, the condition of many prisons is so bad that confinement itself could be considered torture. Many prisoners are not protected against elements nor are they given enough food to sustain themselves.

The conversation often moved to the legal situation of CSOs. One Jordanian participant explained that NGOs must be recognized in order to work effectively as well as have legal standing. NGOs need to be internally accountable and operate under definite rules. The other participants shared this opinion and they referred to the fact that some human rights organizations have not changed their leadership or management for many years; it is essential for their own credibility to build democratic internal structures.

On the question of cooperation partners, one participant from Yemen referred to the importance of including all social groups. This was particularly the case for women’s rights groups and for gaining wider acceptance of those groups by religious authorities. Workshops together in Yemen showed this.

Finally, it was argued that simple legal revisions will not bring about democratic structural reforms. In order to achieve true freedom of opinion, equality, and social justice, significant change in the societal frame of mind and culture is needed. Voting alone will not bring democratic reforms.

#### **Session V: The Role of Free Media as a Pillar of Democracy**

This session was initiated by a Palestinian representative, who spoke about the opportunities presented by new forms of digital media. Cellular phones with built-in cameras, for example, allow anyone to become a journalist, record events as they occur in real time, and publish them on a website. Websites, which can be easily and inexpensively built, provide a medium that can be used by anyone. This presents a particular opportunity to bring alternative sources of news and events into authoritarian countries, and the demand for technological training for CSOs in these countries is high. Others mentioned that consistent English language training would help CSO activists enormously in building contacts to the outside world and to foreign media.

In contrast, some participants questioned the effectiveness of the Internet as a medium in Arab countries due to high illiteracy rates and the restrictions some governments put on Internet access. The most effective medium is still television. The creation of television stations such as *Al-Jazeera* and the increasing availability of satellite television constitute an important step forward. *Al-Jazeera* is setting new quality standards in the Arab television landscape and is putting state-controlled media under pressure. However, the multiplication of satellite programs makes it difficult to establish new stations. Additionally, some television stations, such as *Al-Hurra*, are stigmatized as pro-American, regardless of the quality of their reporting.

The role and meaning of the media for CSOs was repeatedly mentioned by the Syrian participants. During the discussion of the media, the media was actually perceived as a part of civil society. Outlets such as *Al-Jazeera*, which sometimes report on conferences and seminars related to CSOs, offer a platform to raise public awareness of CSOs in the Arab world.

## **Session VI: The Young Generation – Who are the Civil Society Activists of Tomorrow?**

This session concentrated on the question of future civil society activists. It began with the introduction of a young, Jordanian activist and the activities of the National Forum for Youth and Culture in raising political awareness and participation of youth. One example highlighted the success of the movement in engaging youth in the November 2007 parliamentary vote. Since the movement neither recommended particular candidates nor positioned itself against the regime, government representatives were receptive to their approach and met with the youth participants. By hosting discussions, conferences and demonstrations, the Jordanian youth organization was also able to raise interest in politics and increase the number of youth voters in the last election.

Future activities include ideas for youth exchange programs with European and other countries of the region. At the same time, the Jordanian activist mentioned that his organization would like to host exchanges between Jordanian students in order to build an active, educated youth network in the country.

The other participants responded critically to the presentation, claiming these types of organizations are predominantly composed of wealthy, upper-class youth and suggesting that support for drug addicts, the unemployed and homeless children is more important. Additionally, the participants questioned whether it was useful to promote voting among youth if there was no free or fair vote in the first place.

## **Session VII: Working Groups to Follow-Up on Sessions**

In the last session, the participants divided themselves into five working groups according to the following topics:

- 1) Enhancing the performance of civil society organizations in the Arab world
- 2) Reform priorities in the legal system in order to advance human rights
- 3) The role of civil society organizations in monitoring human rights violations and election monitoring
- 4) The role of civil society organizations in promoting good governance
- 5) Obstacles to free media in the Arab world

During the forty-five minutes dedicated to the working groups, the participants had the opportunity to exchange experiences and discuss ideas on how to activate and maintain contact with other organizations. Afterwards they were able to present their suggestions to the group in the final roundtable discussion. The goal was to introduce concrete solutions to the previously discussed challenges as well as to identify opportunities for further action.

The working group format was very positively received. The closing session showed that some working groups worked on very concrete suggestions and ideas whereas others remained rather abstract.

The suggestions of the first working group should be highlighted. Focusing on how to improve the performance of civil society organizations, this group stressed the lack of vision and strategy in CSOs. These organizations do not focus on their own goals or strengths but rather on opportunities to get funding.

Instead, CSOs should focus on their individual concepts and set benchmarks to measure success. This group also suggested that CSOs broaden their communication networks in order to establish efficient, cooperative and coordinated activities.

Finally, the participants suggested that future conferences move from theoretical discussions to a practically-orientated exchange, including practical training sessions. These could, in turn, promote the development of networks and mutual cooperation that cannot be found among Arab CSOs today. ■

## Syria Roundtable Berlin, September 2–4, 2008

### Executive Summary

The situation of civil society in Syria has deteriorated notably in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005. Syrian civil society works under insecure conditions. The Syrian authorities repress activists (arrests, travel bans, harassment), and they try to drown out civil society activism by establishing rival organizations while not licensing the independently established ones. The strict “red lines” that existed under Hafez al-Asad have become blurred under the current President, his son Bashar.

Furthermore, activists have to deal with the false preconceptions Syrian society has of the civil society movement. Aspen invited three key Syrian activists – who are currently finishing a book on civil society in Syria – to discuss current developments with a group of fifteen practitioners and policy makers. In three panels, the speakers gave a thorough analysis of civil society work in Syria.

The speakers stressed the need for external support of civil society activism in Syria. Because of the government’s accusations that activists who accept external funding are “western agents” one has to proceed carefully. Capacity building for communication and for networking is particularly needed.

### Session I: Why Does Syria Need Civil Society?

According to Syrian law, NGOs can register with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The ministry does not issue licenses, however, for organizations other than those requested under its own (or family members’) auspices. Examples of the establishment of “Government-operated NGOs” (GONGOs) can be found in nearly all political spheres, i.e. women, youth or ecology. The speaker differentiated between “sanctioned” and “unsanctioned” organizations, depending on the leeway the government cedes to them. While expressing respect for the work of all who engage in civil society work, the speaker pointed out that the state by sponsoring organizations aims at drowning out any independent civil society movement.

The speaker depicted Bashar al-Asad as a modernizer rather than reformer. Due to the emergency law in force since 1963, citizens cannot rely on rights granted by the constitution. The key to understanding Syrian policy is the regime’s “security ideology”, according to which its own

survival in a hostile environment is the top priority. Because of this threat perception, the authorities tend to consider NGOs as a fifth column.

The growing influence of religious groups in Syrian society, could play a role in societal and political change. Yet the speaker warned against the Syrian government’s policy: there is an unwritten agreement between state authorities and religious groups that the latter get limited space for their activities if they abstain from interfering in politics. While the authorities increasingly withdraw from social affairs, Islamic groups are prepared to takeover political functions overnight should the opportunity present itself.

### Session II: What Freedom for Which Groups?

Individuals working in civil society have a huge responsibility – and activists pay a considerable price for this. The speaker compared four different types of civil society organizations: a charity, a human rights organization, a women’s rights organization and a GONGO. His conclusion was that the most effective organization (influential in society while less subject of political repression) was the charity because of the absence of a political message.

Among the GONGOs, the speaker gave credit to the successful example of a women’s rights organization acting under the protection of the daughter in law of the former minister of defence. While this organization has managed to implement important projects (setting up a program for women in prison, installing a shelter for protecting women from domestic violence) it is still dependent on the goodwill of individuals in leading positions in the administration because of the state’s refusal to guarantee a legal basis for civil society activism.

In the speaker’s eyes, regime change is not the responsibility of civil rights activists. This is the duty of political parties and political representatives. Civil society has to lobby for development in society, even if there is resistance and to convince political actors to adapt policies to popular needs.

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**Session III:**  
**External Support – Helpful or Harmful?**

In this session, particular attention was dedicated to the popular perception of the “foreign/outside”, which is often seen negatively in Syria, in the context of external sponsorship for domestic activities. Groups accepting foreign aid are accused of being steered from abroad even when working on issues of interest to Syria alone.

The speaker characterized the turmoil in Iraq as one of the reasons for the weakening of civil society and opposition in Syria. The image of democracy had been tarnished by the spread of violence in the neighbouring country and caused Syrians to support the authoritarian regime rather than to want change. Western countries could give a positive example regarding their concept of democracy by raising their voices against repression in the Middle Eastern and North African countries, namely Syria, Iran, Libya, but also Israel.

The participants had various concerns regarding future political relations between Syria and the EU and their implications for civil society in Syria. One speaker criticized the current support of religious groups as delivered by the British embassy. With a very selective approach that manipulates the sensitive ethnic or religious balance of Syrian society and opposition, the EU or single member states were supporting limited segments of Syrian civil society instead of supporting the legitimate interests of a broader variety of groups. Sectarian tolerance in Syria was in danger if one group was positively discriminated against. Providing one group only with resources to expand its power position affects not only the regime but has a severe impact on civil society as well. ■

*Two-Day Conference to Discuss the Upcoming 2009 Elections in Lebanon and the Potential and Risks to Election Monitoring as a Tool of Democratization on November 12-13, 2008, Berlin.*





Michael Meyer-Resende, *Democracy Reporting International, Berlin and*  
Martin Kraft, *Crisis Prevention Unit, Federal Ministry of Development and Economic Cooperation*

Maya Bou Ayach, *Member, EU Election*  
*Observation Mission Lebanon 2005*



Roula Mikhael, *Executive Director,*  
*Maharat Foundation*

Karma Boladian, *Office of the Special Coordinator*  
*for Lebanon, United Nations, Beirut*



Ayman Georges Mhanna, *Program Officer*  
*National Democratic Institute, Beirut*

Princess Hayat Arslan, *Former Candidate,*  
*Lebanese Parliamentary Elections*



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# ASPEN LEBANON CIVIL SOCIETY PROGRAM

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**Senior Program Officer: Eva Dingel**

**The Aspen Lebanon civil society program is the most recent of Aspen's policy programs relating to the Near East. The project's primary purpose is to promote the emergence of a vibrant civil society in a democratic and truly sovereign Lebanon. In pursuing this goal, Aspen seeks to engage all Lebanese communities and interest groups, with a particular interest in and emphasis on the *shī'ah* communities.**

[aspeninstitute.de/lebanon](http://aspeninstitute.de/lebanon)

## Supporting Pluralism in Lebanon Through Election Monitoring: How to Ensure Freer and Fairer Elections in 2009? Berlin, November 12-13, 2008

### Executive Summary

The Aspen Institute convened a two-day conference to discuss the upcoming 2009 elections in Lebanon and the potential and risks to election monitoring as a tool of democratization on November 12 and 13, 2008, in Berlin. The conference was designed to bring together experts and stakeholders to share knowledge and create awareness of common challenges. Participants were former members of parliament and parliamentary candidates, academics and representatives of various non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations involved in election monitoring in Lebanon.

The conference was structured into six sessions, devoted to specific aspects of the Lebanese election process. Each session began with two to three short presentations introducing the subject, followed by lively discussion. The sessions' topics included: the limits and potential of international election monitoring as a tool for democracy; lessons learned from election monitoring in Lebanon; the importance of independent candidates for the Lebanese parliamentary elections; the role of the media during the electoral process; prospects for fairer elections in 2009 in light of the 2008 electoral law; and the role of election monitoring in EU democratization policies in Lebanon.

While agreeing that elections are the most legitimate political process, participants found that observers are usually invited to participate too late in the process. Comprehensive, long-term monitoring was said to be required instead and there is a conflict that emanates from the fact that democracy promotion may actually increase levels of conflict over the short-term. When debating the applicability of international electoral standards to the Lebanese context, participants agreed that electoral reform was mostly a function of domestic political will.

Participants pointed to a possible conflict of interest on the part of the EU: on the one hand the EU provides election-related technical assistance, while on the other hand claiming to be a valid arbiter of the fairness of the ensuing elections. Clear benchmarks and readable reports are needed, while better coordination between international and local observers and civil society organizations should ensure that they do not issue diverging reports, as they did after the last elections. The intimidating factor of militias and the importance of uniform ballot cards in preventing manipulation and fraud were also mentioned.

Independent candidates were seen by some as an asset by which to bridge Lebanese confessional divisions. But such candidates lack access to media that are monopolized by confessionally based factions. And the presence of armed militias deters independent candidates from running for office. While some argued that independent candidates actually exacerbate existing political fragmentation, others averred that the real problem in Lebanon lies in the fact that there is insufficient democracy and heterogeneity within existing confessional political blocs.

The challenge in the Lebanese media environment lies in implementing existing campaign-related regulations, rather than enacting new ones. More resources and monitoring were said to be needed in order to prevent politicized coverage that encourages escalatory behavior. Journalists can be freely bought, are riven by conflicts of interest and lack adequate training, and ethics — not to mention a basic code of conduct. The credibility of the Supreme Commission on the Electoral Campaign will remain in doubt so long as it is under the control of the Ministry of Interior.

The 2008 electoral reform law brought a number of benefits: finance reform; new media regulations; a single election day; the abolition of voter cards; a legal framework for election observation; and better poll accessibility. A number of the tougher issues were skipped, however: absentee ballots — because this would favor Christians; an independent electoral commission; ballot reform; a lower voting age — because this would benefit the *Shī'ah*; redistricting and a quota for women. In short, one participant argued, there has been no fundamental change in the electoral system and the reform law has amplified existing confessional divisions.

The task in Lebanon lies in fighting clientelist networks associated with the existing confessional system. The EU's prime motivation in Lebanon appears not to be to promote democracy, but rather to ensure stability and security. And the EU was argued to have shown a bias in favor both of the Lebanese government and in favor of legitimizing elections in this regard. The fact that Lebanon had signed on to, but not fully implemented, internationally-conceived UN electoral standards was advanced to challenge those who persistently bemoaned attempts to impose ill-suited western electoral standards on the very particular Lebanese political environment. ■



**Session I:  
International Election Monitoring as a Tool  
for Supporting Democracy in Post-Conflict  
Environments: Limits and Opportunities**

Elections are an indispensable tool for supporting democracy in post-conflict environments. They have the function of creating legitimacy in a political vacuum, of gathering support for the challenges of transformation and of changing the means of political competition from “bullets to ballots”. The session’s first speaker referred to other sources of political legitimacy, such as religion, the kind of legitimacy derived from liberation movements or the traditional legitimacy attributed to monarchies or to well-known clans or families. But in contrast to such forms of legitimacy, the speaker stated that democratic elections constitute the most objective form of legitimacy.

In the course of the conference, there was significant skepticism as to whether the term “post-conflict environment” was appropriate to characterize the current state of affairs in Lebanon. Despite an atmosphere of “latent conflict” it was argued that Lebanon doesn’t seem to fit the category of a post-conflict country. However, as is the case in post-conflict environments, Lebanon faces great challenges concerning the timing, structure and administration of elections, the design of the relevant institutions and the electoral system. This is where the potential of international election monitoring lies, but there are also several limitations.

Election observer missions typically arrive in-country late in the election process. Both non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental observer missions enter the countries when elections start, which makes an impartial and comprehensive assessment difficult. Due to its inherent tardiness international election monitoring cannot change the fundamental structure of elections and does not impact the overall architecture of the electoral process. It is therefore important to provide comprehensive monitoring on a long-term basis and to evaluate not only the election day itself, but also the pre-election and post-election periods. The size of the country and duration of the mission, should determine the number observers required to observe impartially.

The philosophy of election observation is to provide transparency, to deter electoral fraud, to contribute to confidence and long-term stability, and – most importantly – to provide an impartial assessment of the election process. However, creating confidence and providing an impartial assessment can be conflicting objectives. In fact, providing

an impartial assessment might lead to situations in which electoral observer missions contribute to erupting conflicts. This is not to deny the value of international election monitoring; in the long run, impartial assessment of elections contributes to the consolidation of peace, democracy and trust. But in the short run, more democratic elections do not necessarily lead to the absence of violence; the objectives of “more democracy” and “less conflict” may stand in direct contradiction to one another. It is therefore important for international election observers to be aware of the political signals that are sent when monitoring reports are published. Moreover, it is important to identify legal mechanisms that enable the opposition to challenge fraudulent election outcomes within a reasonable time frame.

International standards on the conduct of elections are a core aspect of international election monitoring. Participants took different views on the question of international standards. Some asked whether it was reasonable to apply such standards in full to post-conflict environments, or whether observation missions instead had to accept that standards cannot always be met and that elections should be measured by lower standards or different criteria. For example, in the Lebanese 2005 elections, observers knew from the beginning that international standards could not be applied in full because the electoral system was deficient. In this case, however, it appeared politically reasonable to hold elections under the existing law instead of drafting new laws before holding elections, even if that meant falling short of international standards.

In contrast to this position, the second speaker emphasized the need to stick to international standards and described the efforts undertaken to develop international criteria and methods for election observation. The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers were adopted on October 27, 2005, at the United Nations in New York and were endorsed by a multitude of non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations (thirty-two altogether). The declaration stipulates principles and criteria on how to observe electoral processes.

The speaker argued that while election monitoring could start at a point where a country cannot and must not meet international standards completely, international standards remain the bottom line for election observation missions. International monitoring organizations should not cease encouraging officials to implement reforms aimed at fairer elections. Of course, as participants observed, such encouragement can only lead to success if political will for improvement exists. In Lebanon, deficiencies in the electoral



system do not seem to stem from a lack of capacity, but are deliberately maintained by political stakeholders.

## **Session II: Election Monitoring in Lebanon – Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead**

A number of lessons were learned from monitoring the 2005 elections in Lebanon. In the course of the second session, representatives from local and international election observation missions shared their experience of election monitoring in Lebanon.

International observers often have the image of being more neutral and impartial than local observers, but in fact there might be a mixture of political agendas behind their mission. While the contribution of international monitoring is to legitimize elections, there is also a danger that the mission will get too involved in the elections. The neutrality of international observer missions should be carefully managed. One of the speakers questioned whether the EU as a provider of technical assistance was really well-placed to judge the results of that technical assistance.

In terms of lessons learned in Lebanon in the 2005 elections, the need for an early invitation to observers to participate was noted as being crucial, because the timing of the invitation has serious consequences for the efficiency of the monitoring. An earlier invitation to the 2005 elections would have improved the quality of EU observation. Another participant later added that in 2005, Lebanese authorities did not issue an official invitation to EU observation missions, but informally allowed the EU mission to monitor the elections. Informal admission contributed to an overly compressed timetable.

One speaker remarked that the lack of clear standards and monitoring benchmarks before 2005 led to a tipping point at which the EU realized that it had to state its benchmarks and principles on electoral observation clearly. Also, it is essential that reports summarizing the monitoring results are made available and are published “in a readable form”. Moreover, thorough base-line analysis and a consistent methodology for monitoring are still lacking. For example, while the implementation of accessibility standards (e.g. making polling stations accessible for disabled voters) is relatively straightforward to check, how about campaign financing regulations? How does one track vote-buying cases? Observing the 2009 elections will be easier than in 2005, because the Lebanese electoral system is well under-

stood and has been thoroughly analyzed. Nevertheless, some methodological questions remain to be answered.

The 2009 elections will be held on one day, which impacts the manner in which observers must be deployed. This time, a larger number of observers will be necessary to check the polling stations. With a large number of observers, the need for coordination and cooperation between local and international observer missions increases.

In the course of discussion, one participant criticized the fact that EU election observers and local observer missions came to different conclusions in assessing the 2005 election process. Overall, the EU report was more positive. This allowed political parties to “jump” on the more positive report. There were no phone calls or exchanges regarding strategy on election day, no communication or coordination between the EU and civil society organizations. This problem should be addressed in 2009. Other participants agreed on the need to improve coordination among external and domestic observer missions. Another participant brought up the relative advantages of local observers in the election process, describing how Lebanese observers were less detectable and could witness things that could not be observed by foreigners.

The issue of violence and pressure in the run up to and during the elections attracted a lot of attention from all participants. While some found that the threat represented by *Hezbollah's* armed presence had been overdramatized by the media, other participants replied that if a political player in Lebanon maintains a large militia, this should be addressed by election observers in some way. Others described how not only *Hezbollah*, but also political leaders from various other political factions used intimidation and pressure as means to manipulate voter behavior. Social exclusion for example is a strong means by which to put pressure on opponents. Psychological pressure and obstacles to participation in the election process are hardly detectable by external observers, who often lack good knowledge of Lebanese political culture.

Finally, participants discussed the lack of uniform ballots. Under the 2000 electoral law, voters could use any ballot they wanted. In practice, most voters used ballots prepared by political groups or specific candidates. The ballots were often produced in ways that made it difficult to choose specific candidates rather than a whole block, even though the electoral system does allow for that. Furthermore, ballots can be prepared in a manner that permits the identification of individual ballots during counting, undermining the secrecy of the vote and inviting vote buying. The draft law

prepared by the Boutros Commission provided for uniform ballots, but ballot reform was not included in the 2008 electoral law. Participants said that the rejection of ballot reform was a deliberate political choice by the Lebanese parliament, which thereby left the door open to further electoral fraud.

Although a rather technical aspect, the choice of ballot has a huge political impact on the outcome of elections. Participants asked whether the “battle of the ballots” had really been lost; others suggested that even if the electoral law did not provide for uniform ballots, they could still be distributed to voters by civil society organizations. Whether or not the distribution of uniform ballots with all candidates’ names included was legally and practically feasible was the subject of animated discussion.

### **Session III: Challenges for Independent Candidates in Lebanese Parliamentary Elections and Their Visibility to Election Monitoring Missions**

Independent candidates face particular difficulties within the Lebanese electoral system. They lack electoral infrastructure, financial resources and media access; the current polarization of Lebanese politics makes it hard for independents to compete with large political blocs. Nevertheless, most conference participants agreed that independents contributed to bridge building and to overcoming sectarianism. It was also suggested that independent candidates could strengthen women’s rights and provide support for women running for parliament. Representation of women in parliament has become particularly important as the introduction of a women’s quota into the 2008 electoral law was rejected. Women should play a more prominent role in the political process in order to fight bribery, discrimination, intimidation and social pressure.

Today, fundraising is becoming more difficult because an ever-increasing amount of money is needed in order to compete with the large political blocs. Another difficulty is that independents are much less visible in the media, as they usually lack access to media outlets, which are monopolized by the large confessional factions. Furthermore, security considerations obstruct the independents’ campaigning. In a number of electoral districts, *Hezbollah* is in de facto control and maintains an armed presence, which inhibits a number of independent candidates from running for office. Some candidates cannot visit their electoral district for months for security reasons. Participants

noted that the support of international election monitoring missions is needed to ensure secure elections, especially for independent candidates.

In the course of the ensuing debate, some participants questioned the utility of independent candidates and asked whether independents necessarily contributed to political stability. The reasoning behind this objection was that in a situation of political fragmentation, a large number of independent candidates would exacerbate fragmentation and make bargaining processes and “getting things done on the ground” even harder.

Another point of contention among the participants was independence; although participants acknowledged that independents have to strike alliances and build coalitions with the political blocs, they also held that maintaining independence was a fine balancing act and that independent candidates should carefully manage their label of neutrality. Interestingly, another participant claimed that not the lack of independent candidates in parliament, but rather the homogeneity of the large political blocs was the real problem. If the aim was to create more complex bargaining processes in parliament and more “opportunity to gamble”, there should be more internal competition within the large political blocs.

There seemed to be some agreement on this point; other participants maintained that confessional factions, especially the *Sunnis* and the *Shī‘ites*, often lack internal democratic procedures and possess patriarchic structures, which leave no room for internal heterogeneity. Reasons for the lack of internal diversity could be that specific circumstances weld the confessional factions together; the assassination of Rafiq Hariri mobilized the *Sunni* community, while opposition to Israel and the liberation of Lebanon’s south constitutes the mobilizing moment for the *Shī‘ites*. However, other participants emphasized that the crux of the matter is for independent candidates to achieve independence from the large blocks, be they *Sunnis* or *Shī‘ites*.

#### **Session IV: What Role for the Lebanese Media During the Electoral Process?**

For decades the Lebanese media have been fragmented along confessional lines. They constitute a powerful political resource for propaganda and serve as a mouthpiece for their respective political “camps”. Chapter six of the new 2008 electoral law provides rules and regulations concerning electoral media, electoral campaigning and election coverage. All media involved in election coverage before, during and after the elections must abide by these regulations. The session’s first speaker argued that the challenge lies not in establishing the legal basis for media conduct, but rather in implementing it in practice.

To understand the performance of the media in Lebanon, one must inquire about the owners and sponsors of the broadcasting institutions. Each political faction owns its own media outlets and this contributes to the exacerbation of structural division. The social, political and economic divide, especially within the media landscape, is likely to remain notwithstanding constitutional reform. Obstacles to more balanced coverage of the upcoming elections remain major and range from the structural and judicial level to the level of language. The media in Lebanon employ a politicized vocabulary that encourages escalation instead of providing objective information.

Measures by which to counter the past destructive role of the media in the 2009 elections could be to provide training for young journalists and to close the gap between academic preparation and journalistic practice. Moreover, objective journalism requires financial resources that often are beyond the capacities of independent media. The second speaker urged that a right to media access be implemented for parliamentary candidates—particularly for independent candidates. The right of journalists to report without hindrance and pressure, and the right of voters to objective information were also highlighted. Voters themselves should not abrogate their right to have access to balanced media coverage.

In order effectively to monitor the Lebanese media in the upcoming 2009 elections, the session’s second speaker pleaded for an increase in financial and human capacity. The EU media monitoring mission for example focused on a mix of field research and content analysis in the 2005 elections. Television and newspaper samples were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively with regard to influence, circulation, ownership, and language. However, problems with monitoring methods remain; for example, more out-

lets should be monitored, but human capacities are limited. New media channels have been opened, and it is unclear how to deal with the vast field of Internet coverage.

During the discussion most participants agreed with the speakers’ observations that the Lebanese media have been turned into a propaganda tool with highly destructive consequences for the political system. They agreed television stations had been allocated between political stakeholders “as if they divided cheese”. Discussion then turned to the Supervisory Commission on the Electoral Campaign that is supposed to supervise the media during the electoral process in 2009. Participants posed the question of how effective and independent the commission’s supervision would be since it is closely linked to the Ministry of the Interior. Several participants also criticized the fact that even though the new 2008 electoral law provides for the supervision of the electoral media by the commission, the separation between election-related and “regular” coverage was not sharp enough, which hampers the implementation of the new provisions.

The role of journalists in election coverage was a key concern for most participants. One participant reported that a downright “auction market” for local journalists exists with politicians bidding for conformist articles. Journalists also often report on political news while at the same time working for a politician’s campaign to earn some extra cash. According to the participants, these examples show that journalists need a code of conduct and must be trained to abide by basic standards of media ethics. At the end of the day, the most effective election observers should be the journalists themselves.

#### **Session V: The 2008 Electoral Law and the Prospects for Fairer Elections in 2009**

The achievements and drawbacks of the new 2008 electoral law are controversial. Are the changes introduced sufficient to ensure fair elections in 2009? Is there room for further reform and improvement or should Lebanon concentrate on implementing existing provisions? How can one move towards greater conformity with international standards after the 2009 elections?

The National Commission on Electoral Law (or the “Boutros Commission”) was appointed in 2007 in order to promulgate suggestions for electoral reform. The commission was established through an official political decision

and brought together twelve members from multiple professional, political and social backgrounds, including three prominent members of civil society, most of whom are experts in the subject of electoral reform. At the same time, a number of Lebanese civil society organizations formed a coalition under the name of the Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform (CCER) with the aim of supporting the National Commission and of providing technical assistance to the commission and other relevant public institutions, specifically the Parliamentary Commission for Administration and Justice and the Ministry of Interior. The Commission engaged in broad public consultations, integrated civil society in the drafting process, and proposed a new draft election law, which could provide a long-term basis for national elections.

The Parliamentary Commission for Administration and Justice spent all of June discussing the contents of the new electoral law. At the end of September, Law 25/2008, incorporating fewer than half of the Boutros Commission's suggestions, was passed by parliament. Civil society representatives said during the conference at Aspen that it was "easy to be pessimistic about the outcome of the reform", although some optimism was expressed that after 2009, the reform process could regain some momentum.

Several reforms that are likely to impact the 2009 elections were adopted in the law:

- The new electoral law provides for the regulation of campaign financing; it tackles the topics of charities used for electoral purposes, transparency of candidates' resources and whether information on electoral funding and spending is accessible to the public.
- New provisions on the regulation of electoral media and electoral advertising attempt to curb the Lebanese media's "bad habits" of biased coverage of the election process. However, during the session participants voiced concerns about the weakness of the new provisions' regulatory powers.
- Holding elections on one day curbs the excesses of the "electoral festival" and prevents reckless campaigns.
- The voter card has been eliminated, thereby circumventing the problem of access and availability of voter cards. Proof of eligibility can be given by using other identity documentation.
- The new electoral law provides a legal framework for election observation, although no specific provisions regulate the rights of domestic and international observers.
- The new law improves the accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities.

However, other reforms were rejected; this is likely to impede freer and fairer 2009 elections:

- Absentee voting from overseas was delayed until 2013 for technical reasons related to the level of preparation of Lebanese consulates.
- No independent electoral commission was established; the Supervisory Commission on the Electoral Campaign was professionalized, but it remains under the control of the Ministry of the Interior, which means there is no guarantee of neutrality. Participants reported allegations that the commission serves merely as a "mailbox" without strong regulatory powers.
- Ballot reform was rejected.
- The voting age was not lowered; this reform would have required an amendment to the constitution and would, thus, have required a two-thirds majority in parliament.
- Suggestions for a new districting system were not adopted.
- A quota for women was not incorporated into the new electoral law.

In the course of the ensuing discussion, several interesting points were raised by the participants. For example, one participant observed that the reforms passed did not constitute a threat to the political blocks' control, while the reforms rejected crossed the "red line" and would have seriously broken the factions' grip on electoral outcomes.

Another participant criticized the new electoral law sharply. A lot of the reforms that were passed did not fundamentally change the electoral system or improve the lack of competition in many electoral districts. For example, with regard to universal suffrage, the new electoral law is worse than the 2000 electoral law; in different districts, seats represent a different number of voters, with a divergence between the equality of Christians and Muslims. In this way, inequality of the vote is built into the system. Another point of criticism is that now twelve of the new voting districts are pure single-confession districts - just Muslim or just Christian. Furthermore, pre-printed ballots would have been a simple but effective measure to curb the manipulability of election outcomes. Because it was so specific and would have had such far-reaching consequences, it was not adopted. Instead, media regulations and financing regulation laws were adopted, because these laws are vaguer and softer, which makes implementation difficult. In terms of confessional structures, the new 2008 electoral law brings no improvement, but rather amplifies confessional division; for example, candidates cannot be confession-free, but have to state their religious confession.

Another participant asked whether civil society should cooperate with the Ministry of the Interior or should rather avoid cooptation and lobby at a grassroots level. Civil society representatives replied that cooperating with the Ministry of the Interior did not exclude grassroots lobbying; both grassroots and institutional channels constitute viable and necessary paths to reform.

In terms of voting age, one participant said that lowering the voting age might harm the fragile confessional balance in Lebanon, considering that demographic change automatically privileges the Muslim communities because of their lower average age. This was argued to be the real reason behind resistance against provisions that foresaw the lowering of the voting age in the new electoral law. A related question is the issue of out-of-country-voting; Christians would profit most from such provisions because more Christians live outside of the country than Muslims. Moreover, more Christians that originate from villages live in Beirut or big cities, and tend not to vote because they shy away from the effort to travel back to their village of origin to cast a vote that does not make a difference anyway; residence voting and out-of-country voting, the participant concluded, would contribute to the participation of the Christian communities.

Another participant observed that one problem with the Boutros Commission proposals was that there had only been one choice offered in order to address the problems. On voting age, on ballots, on all other problematic issues in the 2000 electoral law, the Boutros Commission just issued one reform proposal, which is why the ensuing discussion on reform was stuck with the options of “the proposed reform or nothing”, and often enough, ended up with nothing. The participant also pointed to subjects that are never adequately discussed when talking about reform: voter registration by origin vs. registration by residence; voter representation; candidates who do not belong to the represented confessions; and women’s representation. The participant pleaded for urgent parliamentary reform as well.

#### **Session VI: Concluding Session – Election Monitoring and EU Democratization Policies in Lebanon**

The concluding session’s presentations critically reflected on the potential of and limitations of election monitoring and EU democratization policies in Lebanon. As in previ-

ous sessions, observer neutrality and international standards were the crux of the matter.

The session’s first speaker held that although elections are a core element of democracy, the consolidation of democracy requires more than holding elections. Democratization processes are neither linear nor deterministic; they can be obstructed by stagnation and backlashes, and external actors valuably contribute to overcoming such obstacles. A top priority should be fighting the clientelist and patronage networks that have flourished in the slipstream of politicized confessional affiliations. External and internal actors, furthermore, should work on improving the democratic political culture in Lebanon. The Lebanese need a sense of common citizenship that transcends confessional fragmentation and penetrates the whole of Lebanese territory.

Though approving of civil society participation in the reform process, the first speaker raised some words of caution on civil society representatives that serve as a mouthpiece for political factions, especially organizations founded by politicians or former politicians. Reservations were also expressed towards external funding. Even if external financing is directed at democratization, it might be harmful because it implies that democracy is an overnight process while in fact, it takes time to implement reforms and to establish local ownership. External actors can harm democratization processes by applying ready-made prescriptions to genuinely Lebanese processes. For example, the EU’s condemnation of *Hezbollah* was said to have led to imbalanced support for other groups at the expense of truly democratic consolidation, which would require the inclusion of *Hezbollah*. By allegedly trying to impose western standards on non-western conditions, external actors were said to harm the process of democratic consolidation in Lebanon.

According to the second speaker, the EU’s stakes in Lebanon are mainly determined by security considerations and not by democratization objectives. The EU has a strong interest in supporting a sovereign Lebanon that is immune to regional conflicts, and the 2006 war gave stability even more prominence as an EU policy objective. While the EU has provided support for initiatives that aim at democratization, it has mostly pursued stabilization goals by means of peace-building, state-building and reconstruction aid. In terms of political reform, the EU has not so much focused on pluralism and civil society, but rather on economic and social reform. The implementation of political reforms was interrupted not only by the 2006 conflict, but also by the 2007 crisis and by the period of instability up to May 2008, which culminated in violent clashes. Due to these events,



the EU has concentrated on material reconstruction; this has led to a situation in which progress in the field of judicial, social sector and human rights reform was slow, even where the Lebanese government has attempted reform steps. These past years were said to have demonstrated that without a stable security situation, reforms can neither be undertaken nor implemented.

Election processes are defined as a priority issue for Europeans and have been supported actively, e.g. through election monitoring missions; the EU aims at moving election procedures in Lebanon closer to international standards and at increasing the legitimacy of Lebanese institutions. However, while election monitoring can be a useful tool to generate information on the electoral process and serve as an incentive for electoral reform, there may be a complete contradiction between external actors administering elections and at the same time claiming neutrality.

For example, the EU displays a strong bias towards support for the Lebanese government. The EU's main interest is conflict management, it is likely to opt for compromise and cooperation with political leaders and to build on blocs already in power. Such an approach constitutes a strong intervention in the electoral process and raises the question: is election monitoring a tool to legitimize the electoral process or to legitimize the outcome of the electoral process? The objective of stability and the intent to reach international democratic norms through election monitoring are in conflict with one another. The EU has repeatedly tried to clarify that there is a difference between a technical observation mission and the political stance the EU takes on such a mission. However, as a matter of practice, separating the two is not possible. If an election observation mission is used as a means of democracy promotion, the neutrality of the observer mission and the credibility of the approach are undermined.

In the course of the following discussion, several points were raised. One participant expressed the need for "new blood" in the Lebanese parliament, since the same members of parliament have dominated the political scene for years and have often blocked reforms. The remark corresponded to earlier suggestions by a participant, that parliamentary reform could be a valuable subject for a follow-up conference on Lebanon at Aspen.

Another participant expressed irritation at the allegation of "imposed western standards", since western standards are not equal to international standards. International standards are derived from international agreements and law; these

standards were adopted by Lebanon when it joined the UN. A state that is a member of the "international club" needs to comply with the international rules it has agreed to, which are not purely western or externally imposed. Several participants agreed with this view and added that meeting international election standards would contribute to stabilization and democratization. In reply, the session's first speaker argued that international democratic standards were largely based on western experience, and that sticking to western solutions was harmful when faced with genuinely Lebanese processes and the need for short-term compromise. ■

(From left to right)

Antonio Milošoski, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia and Jason Hyland, Director of the Office of South Central European Affairs, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Ana Trišić-Babić, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering,  
President of the European Parliament

Dragana Radulović, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs  
of the Republic of Montenegro, Head of the Department  
for EU and NATO

*(From left to right)*

*Renate Feiler, Advisor, Cabinet of the President, European Parliament,  
Atonio Milošoski, Foreign Minister of Macedonia,*

*Dr. Ognjen Pribičević, Ambassador of the Serbian Republic to Germany*



*Dr. Raffi Gregorian, Principal Deputy High Representative  
and Supervisor of the Brcko Office,  
Office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina*



Vlora Çitaku, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo



Dr. Winrich Kühne, Director of the Center for International  
Peace Operations ZIF



Dr. Damir Arnaut, Advisor for International Constitutional and Legal  
Affairs to the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Vuk Jeremić, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia

Princess Hayat Arslan, *Former Candidate, Lebanese Parliamentary Elections*





# LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

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**Director of Programs: Dr. Kai Schellhorn, Anna Korte, Monika Kreutz**

Aspen has built lasting relationships and international understanding over the years by convening international meetings of leaders from business, politics, academia and the media.

In a series of sessions, leaders form study groups to examine and discuss in depth issues on the current international policy agenda; they participate in team-building exercises and thereby establish personal relationships and the basis for an ongoing open, respectful dialogue between international decision makers. Participation in Aspen leadership programs is by invitation only.

**The following leadership programs were organized by the Aspen Institute Germany over the course of 2007-2008:**

- **Transatlantic Values:  
Where are the Differences I?, Conference  
April 26-28, 2007**
- **Transatlantic Values:  
Where are the Differences II?, Conference  
September 14-17, 2007**
- **A New Transatlantic Dialogue I:  
May 18-20, 2008**
- **A New Transatlantic Dialogue II:  
October 16-19, 2008**
- **A New Transatlantic Dialogue III:  
December 05-07, 2008**

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## Transatlantic Values: Where are the Differences I? Berlin, April 26-28, 2007

### Session I: What Does Individual Liberty Mean? Karsten Voigt

Mr. Karsten Voigt, Coordinator of Transatlantic Relations of the Federal Foreign Ministry, described the differences between European and American values and provision for individual rights in social institutions. He stressed the following points:

	United States	Germany
Social Issues	Should be left to civil society (NGOs)  The social debate is focused on equal opportunities (more tolerance for unequal income distribution, poverty etc)	Governmental responsibility  Equal outcomes
Individual Rights	Absolute freedom of speech and religion – they don't compete	Limited freedom of speech and religion – when threatening state values (the state is an actor between organized religion and the individual)
	More emphasis on the punishment (i.e. capital punishment and prisoners living conditions)	Balance between atonement and punishment – more emphasis on atonement and re-entering society.
Human Nature	Believe that the desire for democracy is inherent in human nature. Individual freedom and democracy are equated	Democracy is seen as a cultural achievement that took centuries to create (it is an exception to the rule, when observing history). But the desire for freedom is universal (either for the individual or for the community).
Successful Democracy	Free and fair elections	Active and free civil society
Foreign Policy	Regard their co-operation as reward and punishment	Co-operation as a strategy

The discussion mostly centered on questions of human nature and its connection to individual liberties and democracy.

Ms. Sabine Stamer discussed her personal experience of living in the U.S. for 10 years and the questions that pre-occupied her during that time, mainly where can you find

more individual freedom and liberty in the U.S. or in Germany? She found that there is the same amount of rules and regulations in both societies, but there is a feeling of greater individual liberty in the U.S. Why? In Germany, a more serious effort is made to observe the rules (also prompting others to do the same) and people believe in an ordered society, with political solutions. While in the U.S. there is more trust in the independent individual and voluntary community action than in government and public institutions.

Discussion: Where are there more rights and equality for women?

Discussion: The role of historical incidents in a country's collective memory in influencing the characteristics of the culture, society, politics and every issue of daily life.

### Session II: Individual Liberties in a Multicultural Context - William R. Smyser

Mr. Smyser presented an overview of the world's current and prospective international issues.

Main points:

1. For most of the world the globe is divided between the colonized countries and the colonizing countries. This is a defining experience for formerly colonized societies (although hardly recognized by the colonizing societies).
2. The world will soon be completely comprised of multi-ethnic countries (even in Europe which has always been mono-ethnic). This is the cause of most conflicts in the developing world and must be considered in the developed world.
3. Refugees (or immigrants): are interested in community rights before individual rights. But usually there is a transitional change in the second generation. Demands for individual rights arise only when a community feels safe.

Discussion: What creates the legitimacy of a regime? An opposition that can realistically become a majority. Or does it derive from protection of minority rights?

Discussion: What is the correct form of action in dealing with immigrant communities? What are the generational differences in these communities? How do we integrate im-

## Transatlantic Values: What are the Differences II? Aspen, Colorado, September 14-17, 2007

migrant communities – especially when they become hostile and self-sufficient? They need to have political, economic and cultural opportunities in the host culture.

Discussion: Democracy cannot be exported; it has to be a local institution with local content, structure and values.

### Session III: Differences and Similarities – Kiron Skinner

Ms. Skinner analyzed three prominent transitions in U.S. domestic politics, which she believes are all a product of 1968-1970 (a result of the Vietnam War, Watergate and Dayton).

Three main contemporary political views: 1. Neo-Liberal theory (mainly in academia) justice, norms and diplomacy are more important than security issues. 2. Military and security issues should continue to dominate policy. 3. Neo-Conservative theory – (pushed out of the Democratic party in the 1970s and then took over the Republicans).

According to Skinner, U.S. leaders are acting as if the country is pre-1968, they don't understand the new America, which is more polarized, angry and divided and becoming a multi-ethnic democracy (the Hispanic community). The main political problem lies in the differences between institutional reality and the prevailing American ideas (American creed).

Discussion: The power of ideas, as a collective identity in the U.S., since there is such a diversity in ethnic background. Also common to European ideals and values.

Discussion: Anti-Americanism – is it just healthy criticism? The Americans aren't very aware of it. They are concerned with internal issues, but they would probably agree with most ideas. ■

This conference brought together fifteen professionals – nine from Germany and six from the U.S.A; it was dedicated to the very current topic of how political and business circles in Germany and the U.S. react to the phenomenon of climate change.

The first day was dedicated to the question: to what degree are available analytical prescriptions being put into effect by political systems. *Sascha Müller Kraenner*, Senior Policy Advisor, The Nature Conservancy and *Heidi Van Genderen*, Colorado Climate Advisor to Governor Bill Ritter, contrasted the varying transatlantic approaches. The question was said to be gaining increasing traction in individual U.S. states: new environmental protection laws are being passed, and educational activities are being implemented in schools. In Germany the issue is also being dealt with at a national level and therefore carries greater international importance.

On the second day, the discussion was complemented by analyses provided by practitioners. Representatives of academia and academics carrying out basic research in the area of water, *Siegfried Gendries* of RWE Aqua GmbH, *Rob Jackson* of the Duke Center on Global Change and *Thomas Thumerer* of the Munich Re Climate Insurance Initiative (reinsurance) described the complex of issues connected to potable water. Business was said to be applying great pressure on government as it required clear guidelines and frameworks in order to carry out long term planning and make necessary investments in order, for example, to be able to continue to provide basic water and heating services. ■

## A New Transatlantic Dialogue II: Risk and Uncertainty: Cultural Approaches to Risk Management Berlin, May 18-20, 2008

### Executive Summary

Twenty-four leaders – entrepreneurs, policy-makers, journalists, lawyers, and artists ages 25-40 – from Lebanon, Germany, and the United States gathered at the Aspen Institute in Berlin on May 18-20, 2008 to attend a conference entitled ‘Risk and Uncertainty: Cultural Approaches to Risk Management’. Following the model of previous leadership conferences, the aim was to strengthen understanding and friendship among the participants through panel discussions, seminars, and team activities in an informal, off-the-record atmosphere.

This was the first leadership event in Aspen Germany history to include Lebanese, though sadly the outbreak of violence the week before in Beirut prevented four of eight Lebanese participants, and all three of the Lebanese panel speakers, from attending. The small Lebanese contingent nonetheless represented something of the country’s sectarian and ethnic diversity, comprising two Christians, one *Shī’ite*, and a *Sunni* (who was also part Armenian). Despite *Hezbollah*’s closure of Beirut International Airport these four participants were able to attend the Risk Conference in Berlin.

Risk is a normal aspect of daily human life and comprises an invaluable source of education. The conference allowed participants to explore and challenge different concepts and definitions of risk. Participants were encouraged to express their feelings and experiences in relation to risk, which were particularly salient due to the violent upheavals in Beirut.

The topic shows that people are at risk when they learn. This risk may be physical, social, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual in nature.

To strengthen understanding and restore trust in the Middle East region’s civil society, the topic of risk and uncertainty provided an important social and philosophical point of departure for discussion — particularly in the case of Lebanon.

Risk and cultural factors affecting risk perception and management were the focus of the conference’s three discussion sessions. These themes were subtly woven into other activities as well:

- A case study in which participants deliberated over how to act when confronted with a historical “risk” situation;
- Outdoor team-building exercises (Networking in Nature) in the Grunewald surrounding Aspen headquar-

ters that comprised decision making under uncertainty; and

- A close reading of two short texts – Mencius’s reflections on human nature and Plato’s cave parable – which addressed the relationship between trust, risk, and views of human nature.

These different parts of the conference were chosen in order to expand the understanding and meaning of risk and uncertainty in relation to participants from three different cultural backgrounds. This approach allowed the participants to explore the meaning of risk from different perspectives – they could discuss their experiences during the conference session, develop it during outdoor activities, and reflect on it philosophically as well as historically.

### Session I: Understandings of Risk in Three Different Cultures

In the first session, two academics, Alison Cullen of the University of Washington and Rolf von Lüde of the University of Hamburg, introduced the concept of risk and summarized recent research on how culture shapes risk perception. Since the scheduled Lebanese speaker, Mona Fayad, could not attend, Vartan Avakian, a film director from Beirut and conference participant, took her place, briefly discussing how political and demographic factors impact risk behavior in Lebanon.

The English word “*risk*” and the German word “*Risiko*” trace their roots to the Greek word “*risa*,” which means avoidance of rocks while sailing. Latinate variations of the term were first used in the Middle Ages among merchants, captains, and maritime insurers referring to the likelihood of losing cargo or investments at sea though shipwreck or pirates.

Risk usually means the “hazard or chance of loss,” (Cullen) and is measured in terms of the likelihood of an undesirable event occurring and magnitude of damage the event would incur (Risk = Probability x Damage (von Lüde)). Von Lüde drew from the work of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, who introduced the distinction between “risk,” and “danger.” Risks are consequences or characteristics of decisions; we “take” them, or are “exposed to” them, when we chose a course of action (or non-action). Dangers, on the other hand, arise as consequences of others’ decisions and apply to those affected by others’ decisions.

Both presenters stressed the role of culture in shaping in-

dividuals' *perception* of risk and their *willingness* to take risks. In "collectivist cultures," the group protects individuals against risks by consenting to shoulder the burdens of a potential loss. In "individualist cultures," individuals are expected to bear their own losses. In reality, most societies adopt some amalgam of the two approaches. Neither type necessarily behaves in a "riskier" manner than the other: that depends on whether the groups embrace a tradition of (individual or collective) risk-taking. Many participants thought it curious that in describing this dichotomy the researchers (and presenters) spoke only in terms of potential losses, not gains.

Alison Cullen emphasized demographic differences in risk behavior across U.S. regions, political parties, and socioeconomic backgrounds. She observed that risk perception exerts a massive influence on voting patterns and government behavior, even in situations where risk is very hard to calculate.

Mona Fayad, a *Shī'ite* psychologist at the Lebanese University in Beirut well-known in Lebanon for attacking *Hezbollah's* censorship of *Shī'ite* opinion during the 2006 war with Israel, was to present in the first panel. She could not attend. In her stead, Vartan Avakian drew on the categories of risk cultures presented by von Lüde to present a complex picture of Lebanon. A volatile history along with a less-well known but still important legacy of entrepreneurship among the middle and upper classes has promoted a marked "every man for himself" ethos – offset, however, by strong and often opposed communal identities. Mr. Avakian – whose mother is Maronite Christian and father an Armenian – also stated that "small" communities like the Armenians and the Druze approach risk differently than the larger ones do (such as *Sunnis*, *Shī'ites*, and Maronites). While the former often favor low-risk, conciliatory political agendas, having much to gain from stability, the latter tolerate "riskier" political behavior in the hope of improving their position *vis-à-vis* relatively equally matched competitors.

After these presentations, discussion touched on a number of issues related to risk perception and attitudes toward risk. Holger Becker, a physicist and the CEO of ChipShop GmbH in Jena, Germany, averred that professional culture influences risk behavior possibly more than national or regional culture: entrepreneurs from Lebanon, the U.S. and Germany probably had attitudes toward risk more similar to one another than to the working classes of their own countries. Participants discussed how the risk of terrorist attacks has influenced political behavior in the United States since 9/11 (there was consensus that fear had been

abused for political gain by the U.S. Administration, but opinions on this point were expressed with civility).

Rachel Kleinfeld, Director of the Truman National Security Project in Washington, DC, introduced the idea that many Americans' high tolerance of risk stems from the fact that the United States is primarily comprised of an immigrant population, made up of groups and individuals who have endured great risks and continue to embrace a profound faith that hard work can bring personal success.

### Case Study Group Exercise Involving Risk Management

In this exercise, participants were split into three groups according to nationality and asked to determine how they would respond to a "high risk" dilemma. Although framed as a hypothetical scenario, the dilemma was essentially that of the Jewish defenders of Masada besieged by Roman armies in 66 BC (see Appendix I for the scenario and options).

Groups were given forty-five minutes to debate four options; the ensuing discussion following was moderated by Prof. Dr. Christian Hacke, Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Political Science and Sociology, Bonn.

Majorities in each group chose option two (a surprise breakout attack). The deliberating styles differed, but the teams' rationales were basically the same. Option two appealed because it allowed the groups to retain control over their own fate, even if that meant death. Justifying one, three, and four involved making assumptions about how the enemy would act – that is, taking risks that could only be very imperfectly defined due to lack of information.

Every group noted that, in weighing their options, they were not only weighing risk; they were choosing which values to embrace. Courage and independence – epitomized in option two – trumped bare survival, in all groups, particularly the Lebanese (who voted unanimously for option two) and the Americans (eleven-to-two in favor of option two). The Germans were the most closely split, choosing option two by a margin of five-to-four. They relied on a quite systematic approach to deliberation and expressed considerable anxiety over not having a unanimous vote.



**Session II:  
Assessing and Managing Risk:  
Perspectives from Business and Finance**

Aspen Executive Director and former CEO of Credit Suisse Investment Funds Moscow Charles King Mallory IV moderated the second panel session, which featured business executives sharing their views on risk management. Although the Lebanese speaker Nagy Rizk, Fund Manager of the Building Block Fund, which invests in medium sized businesses in Lebanon, could not attend, this session produced the liveliest exploration of risk management – particularly the ethics of risk management – of the entire conference.

Maury Bradsher, CEO of the District Equity Group of Washington, DC, defined risk management as measures taken to minimize risk by reducing the potential damage or the likelihood of undesirable events occurring. He emphasized the importance of following oversight and auditing procedures and, most of all, the critical role of strong character and leadership. The surest strategy to manage risks – which are omnipresent in business – is to cultivate a culture of integrity and inclusivity in the workplace, beginning at the top, he said. When subordinates are “yes men”, the firm risks drifting into dangerous situations unawares. “Protect your heretics” – as Mr. Mallory summarized Mr. Bradsher’s position – since they are sometimes crucial in honestly and accurately assessing risks.

Holger Becker of ChipShop GmbH stressed that markets, unlike physics, are not deterministic. Managers need to have integrity, good instincts, and an eye for the long-term. Engineers, used to calculating and modeling, need to learn how to think “with the gut” to be successful in business. Since starting a company with his own money, Mr. Becker observed that he has become more conservative and focused on the long-term implications of his decisions. This set his company apart from many multinational corporations, where the short tenure of CEOs encourages a risky preoccupation with near-term over long-term goals.

Both presenters kept returning to the ethics of risk taking – an issue that dominated the ensuing group discussion, too. Participants agreed that dishonesty about risks that had been taken is a frequent cause of disasters and scandals. Enron is one example; the recent housing crisis in the USA. is another. Outside of the financial sector, in businesses with a less quantitative approach to risk management, managers sometimes protect themselves from risk via willful ignorance: not knowing the dangers of a product or procedure protects them against lawsuits.

The Lebanese were quiet for the first part of the discussion. By way of explanation, Mr. Avakian said that businesses from his country are not prosperous enough, nor are there sufficient levels of foreign investment to make economic risk management a sufficiently consequential issue. Chadia El Meouchi (Badri & Salim El Meouchi Law Firm, Beirut), added that foreign interference in domestic affairs and a tendency toward conspiracy theory mentalities mean that Lebanese often think – to borrow Niklas Luhmann’s distinction – in terms of “dangers” posed to them instead than “risks” actively assumed. In the most penetrating suggestion, Mansour Aziz, editor of the influential weekly *Al Akbar*, said that in the U.S. and Europe, cheating and dishonesty are almost always, eventually, exposed by the media: thus it pays in the long run to be good. Lebanon lacks a sturdy rule of law and vigorous media oversight, so corruption is more accepted – and more necessary. Chadia El Meouchi added that she would expect a small entrepreneur in Lebanon to pay bribes because it is necessary simply to stay in business.

Parag Khanna, author of *The Second World, Empires and Influence in the New World Order* and Director of the Global Governance Initiative at the New America Foundation, observed that Ms. El Meouchi’s perspective had opened the question of whether individual ethical standards should differ between corrupt and non-corrupt nations. Christian Hacke sympathized with those forced to pay bribes in corrupt countries, while Mr. Mallory took a more critical stand, arguing that corruption drains capital and foreign investment, significantly hindering growth in developing countries.

Most participants agreed that the best way to combat unethical behavior is to make it unprofitable. But Stephan Liening, a German personal advisor to the Head of the State Chancellery of North Rhine Westfalia, worried that the bottom line perspective compelled business leaders to view virtue too instrumentally. This point was echoed by Hana Hamadeh (American University Beirut), who mentioned that a recent study by the business school at the American University of Beirut found that business school students exhibited a more “rule compliance” approach to ethics than non-business students, who paid closer attention to circumstances and showed more sophisticated moral reasoning skills.

## Networking in Nature

Risk is normal in the daily lives of all human beings and is essential to their education. To avoid deleterious effects of improperly designed programs with dangerous consequences, safety is an essential ingredient. One of the primary objectives of the Networking in Nature game, trust-building activities and inclusive co-operative competitive games, is to help participants deal with the process of risk and the product of behavioral change.

For the outdoor activity 'Networking in Nature' three groups, each of mixed nationality, competed in five team-building activities in the woods surrounding the Aspen Institute. The participants had to solve five puzzles requiring the engagement and motivation of each team member. The concept of the games included a risk-based decision, whereby each group had to determine whether the risk was worth its reward. The goal was to strengthen group cohesion and give the participants a chance to test their collaborative problem-solving skills regarding risk decisions in a friendly but competitive atmosphere.

'Networking in Nature' demonstrated that education involves a certain level of risk taking. People learn to challenge their beliefs by taking risks. This risk may be physical, social, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual in nature. At the end of 'Networking in Nature' the Aspen participants assumed a new identity for one day by wearing their group color.

## Session III: Risk and the Community: Communicating in High Risk/Low Trust Situations

The final panel session was intended to build off of earlier discussions of the ethics of risk and to focus on the challenges of being honest and accurate in communicating risks. Ziyad Baroud, Court Lawyer for the Beirut Bar Association, and Ulf Doerner, a management consultant with HHR Consulting and African wildlife activist, were to discuss strategies for raising awareness of underestimated risks and moderating fears sparked by exaggerated risks. Unfortunately, Mr. Baroud could not attend, but Mr. Doerner drove the session with an engaging presentation on the psychological effects of encountering and living in the wilderness, as well as the many ways in which humans perceive and misperceive risk when they are no longer in society.

As a self-professed rationalist and electrical engineer by profession, Mr. Doerner's said he was struck in his first excursions into the wilderness by the sense of confrontation with "unmasterable" forces – wild animals, terrain, and hardships which far out-powered the human will. Over many years of leading small leadership training groups, he has become fascinated by how individuals' perception of the natural environment, attitudes toward the group, and moods change as they adapt to life in the bush. Of the notion of risk in particular, he noted that even over just five days humans develop higher sensitivities to the natural and animal risks around them. He also shared some of his experiences of the ways in which different creatures – alligators, tigers, rhinos, and elephants – communicate risk in a language of noises and gestures that socialized humans have almost entirely forgotten but can readily relearn through contact with African tribes.

## Socratic Dialogue: Mencius Human Nature and Plato's Republic

In preparation for the conference, all participants were assigned short passages from Mencius's Human Nature and Plato's Republic. The texts presented divergent notions of human nature, with Mencius embracing the optimistic view that man is naturally inclined to do good, and Plato the more ambiguous position that humans are born in chains in a cave, seeing only the shadows of truth and having to struggle painfully toward enlightenment. Moderators Todd Breyfogle, Director of Seminars at Aspen USA, and Justin Reynolds of Aspen Germany, focused the discussion around the question of how views of human nature shape attitudes toward risk and individual and social habits of trust or distrust.

Instead of focusing on the texts themselves, participants used their ideas as platforms for a broader discussion that drew on national perspectives, personal experiences, and scientific findings particularly involving cognitive and neuroscience and developmental psychology. Some members from each nationality thought it divisive and unproductive to make assumptions about the moral inclinations of human nature – though they noted that such assumptions are usually both informed by and inform one's willingness to take risks and trust others. Although a few participants seemed to discount Plato and/or Mencius as naive or outdated, many found the discussion stimulating and expressed their interest in hosting similar activities either at their own business or organization or again through the Aspen Institute.

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**Appendix I**  
**Case Study Group Exercise Involving**  
**Risk Management****The Situation:**

The team members are citizens of a city on a mountain that is surrounded by enemies. The city's defense forces are outnumbered ten to one by their enemies. So far, the strong city walls have been able to hold off the enemy's attacks, but the city's supplies are dwindling and even the water supply is running out. It seems death is imminent for the besieged city.

The citizens have developed four potential courses of action. The team should choose one of the options and justify its choice.

**Option One: Sacrifice**

To save the lives of the citizens, hand the city over to the enemy without damage. To mollify the aggressive enemy, the city will send out twelve of its oldest citizens as hostages for the enemy to kill. These hostages will be volunteers. In exchange, the enemy must promise not to harm the rest of the citizens. (Analogy to the citizens of Calais)

**Option Two: Surprise**

Some of the besieged support a surprise attack on the vastly superior enemy. Considering the enemy's ten to one numerical advantage, the moment of surprise and the city's fighting morale must be absolutely perfect. The approaching full moon appears to be an opportune time for such an attack. (Analogy to Greek mythology)

**Option Three: Stratagem**

Mislead the besiegers into believing that the citizens are living in lavish luxury behind the city walls, while the besiegers are going hungry outside. To do this, the city would use its remaining supplies to build an ox and stuff it with all of the food remaining in the city. They would then bring the ox to the city walls and lower it down to the enemy. This should make clear to the enemy that the city cannot be starved out. This would cause the enemy to give up their siege and return home. (Analogy to the example of Countess Lichtenau of Saxony)

**Option Four: Demotivation**

The citizens set their city on fire and "flee" to the enemy. According the supporters of this option, the enemy would see nothing more to gain from the burning city and would have no interest in killing the fleeing citizens. ■

## A New Transatlantic Dialogue II: Leadership in Times of Change Istanbul, October 16-19, 2008

### Introduction

This conference brought twenty-six leaders in business, culture and academia together -- mainly from the United States, Germany, and the Lebanon, but also from Jordan and Turkey to Istanbul. Istanbul was chosen since Beirut and all of Lebanon were in a state of political turmoil during the Spring of this year and because of the German Federal Foreign Office travel advisory for Beirut.

The topic of the conference was: "Leadership in Times of Change". Given the fact that globalization is changing social, political and economic relations, what does leadership mean and how is it established? And how does the understanding of leadership differ from culture to culture? The relevance of this topic was accentuated by the world financial crisis, which became apparent to the broader public about the time of the conference.

Three prominent scholars and practitioners agreed to give presentations during the conference. All of them combine practical and academic experience, quite apart from the fact that they are experts on their respective cultures.

*Daisy Khan* – Executive Director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement, USA

*Volker Schlegel* – Ambassador (ret.) and Member of the Advisory Board, Management Engineers GmbH & Co. KG, Germany

*Gilbert Doumit* – Consultant, 2008 Yale World Fellow, Lebanon

### Welcome Dinner

The conference started with a welcome dinner within a stone's throw of the Hagia Sophia. The German consul general Matthias von Kummer with his wife, the Lebanese consul general Dr. Tannous Aun and a representative from the U.S. consulate, Jonathan Crince were the guests of honor. Consul general von Kummer kindly opened the conference with a speech on the long and deep relationship between Germany and Turkey.

### The Conference Sessions

The conference agenda included three sessions as well as a "networking-in-nature" activity and a simulation.

#### Session I: Leaders: Born or Made – What Does it Mean to be a Leader?

*Moderator: Dr. Kai M. Schellhorn,  
Director of Programs, The Aspen Institute Germany*

*First of all, one should ask: "What does it mean to be a leader? What are the character traits, skills and styles of effective leaders? Do these factors and characteristics differ from culture to culture? Furthermore, one should discuss whether leaders are born or made. In other words, is leadership ability and cognitive capability already set at birth or are they gained through experience? In this session, participants exchanged views on their interpretations of leadership – personal, social, historical, religious, or economic – and examined ways of shaping attitudes towards leadership by analyzing similarities and differences within Lebanon, the United States and Germany.*

In the first session Miss Daisy Khan posed three questions, which are vital for any potential leader: 'What motivates one to become a leader? Where does one get the moral encouragement?' and 'Where does one get the necessary courage?' She examined the questions from the standpoint of an American Muslim. She gave examples from her own development and life. She started to ask herself about the American Muslim community and its leadership especially after the events of September 11, 2000. From that point onwards, Miss Khan felt impelled to promote moderate Muslim views in the western world; she stressed that leaders are more made through the situation and less born.

Ambassador Schlegel started his presentation with an examination of prominent leaders from the past: Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Wallenstein, Napoleon Bonaparte, Bismarck, Mao Tse Tung, Lenin, Lincoln, Wilson and Adenauer, to name just a few. Starting from this historical perspective he elaborated elements of leadership: goal orientation, communication skills, courage to make decisions, as well as an ability to persuade third parties to follow. Although Schlegel pointed out that there are differences between political, business and military leaders and that there are also differences between cultures, most no-

tably concerning the values and characteristics of leadership, people usually tend to expect a leader to solve a problem in an efficient way, based on a broad consensus.

Gilbert Doumit on the other hand, started with the remark that leadership is in a state of crisis. This term is nowadays related to terms like oppression, money, and crime. In religion, culture and social life leadership faces serious problems, since it is branded with negative connotations (e.g. hierarchy, patriarchy and infallibility). Like Khan, Gilbert Doumit stressed that everyone has enough talent to influence a community and he defined leadership in a similar way to Ambassador Schlegel: exercise of influence to serve a greater idea, which might be negative or positive. In other words one has to have power from people, power from productivity as well as power from purpose.

### **Session II: Leadership: Between Vision and Reality – The Meaning of Values and Communication**

*Moderator: Chadia El Meouchi,  
Badri & Salim El Meouchi Law Firm, Beirut/Lebanon*

*In this session, the role and importance of value-based leadership and communication was discussed. Do values and communication differ from culture to culture? And what values and communication are needed to make visions real? Or, are values visionary and not communicable? And do we need communication (verbal and non-verbal) for leadership? The participants exchanged their perceptions of the role of values and communication in effective leadership and examined ways of shaping attitudes toward leadership by analyzing similarities and differences between Lebanon, the United States and Germany.*

In the second session Daisy Khan made clear that, in terms of values, a leader has to address social justice and one needs to be mission driven, not self-driven. Furthermore, a leader needs to be just; in other words he/she should not be selfish. Finally, a leader needs to put himself also into the appropriate power structure. However, this view was challenged by Gilbert Doumit in his presentation.

Volker Schlegel, on the other hand, stressed the change in values that took place after the Second World War. He saw family values as being important, even though he acknowledged the fact that they have undergone massive changes and even erosion in the last decades. Therefore he pled for

a return to these values. Nevertheless, he also espoused the view that personal work is nowadays more highly valued than it used to be -- in the political sphere as well. Ambassador Schlegel was convinced that there is no time anymore to lead properly, since there are too many commitments arising from an ever more globalised world.

In closing, Gilbert Doumit stressed the non-conformity, which leaders need to have, in order to be successful. This includes materialistic values, like cleverness, social values, the family values that Volker Schlegel spoke of as well as respect from and towards others. Furthermore the role of, social values, like patriarchy, charisma and an emotional appeal, should not be underestimated. The result is a popular leader for good or bad.

### **Session III: Leadership: Moving from Individual Success to Significance**

*Moderator: Todd Breyfogle,  
Director of Seminars, The Aspen Institute USA*

*In this session, the way in which morality influences individual success and the common good was discussed. How do leaders prioritize between individual success and the greater good of society? How does culture influence this priority? What is your personal kind of vision? Which obligations should a leader follow? In this session, participants examined how leaders can use their power and leadership in ways that will help to improve society.*

The last session was opened by Gilbert Doumit. He especially stressed in his presentation the 'extraordinary and outstanding' success of the United States. This exceptional leadership, which the USA exerts on large parts of the world, can, however, as Doumit pointed out, be a threat to other people and may irritate them.

In contrast to Doumit's remarks, Volker Schlegel tackled the topic of the last session from a more theoretical standpoint. He held the view that the majority of leaders do not choose between individual and broader success. Individual striving leads at best more imprudently to positive outcomes for the entire community. Therefore, Ambassador Schlegel pled for two things: first of all, dynamic personal characters are important for leaders. Otherwise they will become too content with their achievements and will care less about their actual task. This, however, does not mean



they have to be flexible in their moral standards. On the contrary, a universal moral code – a set of standard values – is needed, which is respected by everyone, as could be seen in the current financial crisis. Furthermore, this new set of standard values need to be practiced and has to be inculcated from the very beginning (kindergarten age). This would rule out the problem of free riders, who only want to profit from it and not participate in its creation.

Daisy Kahn concluded the session as well as the conference with her remarks. In her opinion leadership is no longer defined by a value system of one particular society, since this would make people upset. Furthermore she stressed the fact that the absence of a traditional educational system causes problems, too. Since these institutions usually provided the people with a set of values.

### Networking-in-Nature

*At the former summer residence of the German Ambassador in Tarabya*

Beside these rather academic discussions, the conference also included a practical part to ensure two ends. First, the participants should get to know each other better so that possible networks can be created. Second, to give participants an opportunity to practice leadership skills.

One of the primary objectives of networking-in-nature games, trust activities and inclusive co-operative competitive games, is to help participants deal with the process of leadership and behavioral change.

The networking-in-nature activity took place at Tarabya, which is situated north of Istanbul, on the premises of the former summer residence of the German ambassador.

For the outdoor networking-in-nature activity three groups, each of mixed nationality, competed in five team-building activities in the woods surrounding the former summer residence.

The concept of the games included leadership-questions and the question of group management. The goal was to strengthen group ties and give the participants a chance to test their collaborative problem-solving skills regarding leadership decisions in a friendly but competitive atmosphere.

The first task was the “trust fall”, meaning that every participant had to stand on top of a slope and then fall backwards into the arms of the other team members.

The “spider-net” game and the so-called “crocodile-rock” game entailed, next to the question how to organize the group and who is the leader of the group, the use of balance and coordinated movements. Another game was called the “blind mathematician”. The task was to form a square with a rope, but in the process all of the participants had to wear sleeping masks. The participants had to discuss the strategy and the role of the group members and leadership.

Next to the main question of solving the puzzles and tasks as a group in as little time as possible, the assumption was that everybody who conscientiously tries earns the respect of the whole group. The cooperative, supportive atmosphere during the games tends to encourage the participants and build team spirit.

This very successful and entertaining afternoon closed with a barbecue at which a lively and vibrant mixture of different dancing cultures could be observed.

### Simulation “The Moon Expedition”

The simulation, through which leadership-perceptions were analyzed, involved three groups formed according to nationality – a Lebanese, an American and a German group.

The simulation underlined the role of group dynamics and the role of leadership. The management of group dynamics can emerge in the hands of any given group member and it is also possible that the person with the authority to lead may not be the person who is actually best at managing group dynamics. This was designed to be demonstrated in the context of the simulation as was the manner in which group leadership practices differ from culture to culture.

The rules of the simulation were as follows:

Each group's spaceship has just crashed on the moon. The group was scheduled to rendezvous with a mother ship two hundred miles away on the bright side of the moon, but the rough landing has ruined the ship and destroyed all the equipment on board except for the fifteen items listed below. The crew's survival depends on reaching the mother ship, so each group has to choose the most critical items available for the two-hundred-mile trip. The task is to rank the fifteen items in terms of their importance for survival, placing the number "one" by the most important item, number "two" by the second most important, and so on, through number fourteen, the least important. The items include: a box of matches, food concentrate, fifty feet of nylon rope, parachute silk, a solar-powered portable heating unit, two 45-caliber pistols, one case of dehydrated milk, two one-hundred-pound tanks of oxygen, a star map (of the moon's constellations), a self-inflating life raft, a magnetic compass, five gallons of water, signal flares, a first-aid kit containing injection needles, and a solar-powered FM receiver-transmitter.

Each group had thirty minutes to discuss the rank order of all the items and to elect a leader, who had to make the final decision for the group. In this process the manner in which the national groups were organizing themselves and how they made the leadership decision could be observed. The leader of the Lebanese group accordingly was not elected, but rather directly appointed. Afterwards each leader of the group had to present his decision and to explain the reasons for his decision.

The Lebanese and American groups reached roughly the same results. Both settled on a somewhat rational solution by arranging the items according to what is needed most for a two-hundred-mile walk. Obviously water, oxygen and food were amongst the top priorities. A box of matches and the nylon rope were among the last items to be mentioned. The American group had to discuss the importance of the pistols for the role of a leader.

The German group came up with a different solution. They proposed building a balloon and flying to the proposed meeting point. Therefore, oxygen, the raft as well as the parachute silk were favored items. Food, dehydrated milk and the box of matches were not needed in the solution of the German group. After having presented the German proposed solution, members of the other groups expressed the view that the proposed German solution was a perfect example of German engineering and thinking.

## Conclusion

It has to be said that the conference on 'Leadership in Times of Change' was a great success. In each session, after the formal presentations, one could witness a heated discussion about the respective topic. This shows that the participants were very much engaged by the topic since leadership is something every one of the participants needs to prove in one situation or another. The current global financial crisis raised particular questions and caused debates on how successfully to establish moral leadership, which lasted long after the official end of each session. The networking-in-nature exercise as well as the simulation helped participants get to know each other better and to create first steps toward establishing an enduring network among them. They were also good devices by which to highlight differences in the respective cultures, to help participants accept them and especially to create understanding and respect for these differences. ■

## A New Transatlantic Dialogue III: Leadership in Times of Change German and U.S. Leaders in Dialogue with the Balkans Berlin, December 5-7, 2008

This conference's keynote speech was given by the Serbian Republic's Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Vuk Jeremić*, during a first panel, titled "Political Developments in the Region of Southeast Europe after Kosovo's Declaration of Independence, that was chaired by Ambassador *Wolfgang Ischinger* and dealt with the political and diplomatic consequences of Kosovo's declaration of independence. *Jason Hyland*, Director of the Office of Central European Affairs of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs of the U.S. Department of State commented on Mr. Jeremić's speech. The subsequent discussion was devoted to the question of whether Kosovo's declaration of independence had stabilized the security situation in the Western Balkans, the impact of the declaration on neighboring states, the precedent that it set and Serbia's future path to integration within the European Union.

*Antonio Milošoski*, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Macedonia addressed the second panel. The panel's title was "The Results of the Bucharest NATO-Summit in the Context of the EU-Enlargement Process in Southeast Europe." It was chaired by *Dr. Damir Arnaut*, Advisor for International Constitutional and Legal Affairs to the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania *Lulzim Basha*, Parliamentary State Secretary in the German Ministry of Defense, *Christian Schmidt*, and *Dr. Dušan Reljić*, Senior Research Associate of Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin responded to foreign minister Milošoski's presentation. The subsequent discussion revolved around the Greek-Macedonian dispute over a name as an obstacle to Macedonia's NATO membership and the security situation in the Western Balkans since the announcement of NATO Membership Action Plans for Albania and Croatia.

The fourth panel was devoted to the topic of "Regional Cooperation: Chances and Challenges of Local Ownership – Expectations of the Regional Cooperation Council". The panel was moderated by *Johannes Jung*, Member of the SPD parliamentary group in the German Bundestag and Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the German Bundestag. Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Ana Trišić-Babić*, addressed the panel. *Dr. Emily Haber*, Deputy Director-General, South-eastern Europe and Turkey of the German Auswärtiges Amt, and *Dr. Raffi Gregorian*, Principal Deputy High Representative and Supervisor of the Brcko Office, Office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina responded to Ms. Trišić-Babić's presentation. The subsequent discussion focused on regional cooperation as a means of conflict prevention.

*Vlora Çitaku*, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo addressed the fifth and final panel that was titled "Joining the West: EU-Enlargement, Market Economy and Energy Security" and was chaired by *Igor Radojičić*, President of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Ms. Manish Singh*, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Trade Policy and Programs, Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State and *Dr. Ivan Vejvoda*, Executive Director of The Balkan Trust for Democracy, responded to Ms. Çitaku's presentation. The subsequent discussion centered on institutional preparedness for EU accession in the Western Balkans.

There were two additional events on the program. On the evening of Friday, December 5, 2008, a reception for the Friends of the Aspen Institute was organized, at which *Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering*, President of the European Parliament addressed the conference participants and guests on the subjects of U.S.-EU relations and the security situation in the Western Balkans. During the evening of Saturday, December 6, 2008 at dinner at Schloß Cecilienhof, *Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger*, Chairman of the Munich Security Conference addressed the conference participants on the challenges of facing Balkan countries seeking accession to the European Union.

### Political Developments in the Region of Southeast Europe After Kosovo's Declaration of Independence

A participant stressed that both the European Union and the United States need to engage in dialogue with the Western Balkans, especially regarding specialists and young professionals. He expressed his disappointment at the failure of the Troika, which tried to find a diplomatic solution to the question of the independence of Kosovo in 2007. At the same time he stressed the importance of the factor of time and the importance of political will in order to find diplomatic solutions.

Another participant expressed his disappointment at the failure of the Troika as well and stressed that the politicians of the region have not given up their search for political solutions. He saw the year 2009 as a key year for European Union membership in which it was up to Serbia to climb to a "point of no return". He saw the role of Serbian politicians as creating and supporting a new, more constructive

climate. He pointed out that the secession of Kosovo from Serbia was a highly emotional subject touching on several key national issues (such as identity, history and borders), which needs time to be accepted. The speaker pointed out that this was the first time in Serbian history that a conflict of this dimension occurred peacefully. For example the EULEX (European Union Rule of Law) mission in Kosovo, which was seen as hostile at the beginning, is regarded as friendly now and is supported by the Serbian public. He stressed the importance of continuing on the path, which Serbia has followed since the democratic revolution of 2000 and the political change of 2008 from the Koštunica to the Tadić administration. The speaker's goal was Serbian membership in the European Union. Serbia must start moving rapidly in that direction in concrete terms. Though aware of its achievements to date, Serbia still has to struggle to reach a "point of no return" concerning membership. He asked the European Union for positive signals and clear benchmarks which Serbia can fulfill.

In the subsequent discussion, one participant stressed that Kosovo, in contrast to the view of some other participants, declared its independence in a legal manner. Serbian politicians had nine years to find other solutions. She expressed the opinion that the foundation of the Republic of Kosovo was a step forward for human rights and must be seen as the direct consequence of the breakup of Yugoslavia and of aggressive Serbian policies. It is common sense that, after extensive political and diplomatic negotiations, the independence of Kosovo is irreversible.

Another participant wondered whether the discourse about independence was less about threatened minorities than about maintaining historical boundaries. Regarding the constitution of Kosovo, several participants certified that the new state lays down enormously high principles regarding minority rights.

The question of whether Kosovo's declaration of independence brings instability to the region, as argued by some representatives of the international community, was also discussed. This has not happened so far. The EULEX-mission has succeeded because it is applied throughout Kosovo, something Serbia had refused to accept at the outset. The participants agreed that both Priština and Belgrade have a pro-European attitude and support the process of establishing democratic structures.

Kosovo was said to be a region of strong interdependencies, regarding geographical position, history and the structure of its population. This dictates a high level of regional cooperation. The development of Kosovo would

advance the whole region, including Serbia. The participants concluded that the parties should concentrate on common objectives and values to step forward together.

Several participants expressed the opinion that both Kosovo and Serbia should turn away from the past, which had brought painful experiences equally for both sides. What unites the whole region is agreement to follow the framework of the EU accession process.

The foundation of the Republic of Kosovo confronted Serbia with two general issues: The question of Serbian identity and the protection of the Serbian minority.

One of the invitees expressed the view that the EU and Serbia do not share the same attitude towards the meaning of borders: While in the EU the issue of borders is becoming more and more irrelevant due to freedom of movement, many Serbs are stuck with an understanding of borders as the basis for their identity.

Both sides should concentrate on common goals, which are first and foremost the establishment of democratic structures, a functioning economy and the fight against organized crime. In order to achieve these objectives, the whole region should coordinate and cooperate as much as possible. The region was said to have made astonishing progress, while still remaining fragile and in need of the support of the European Union and the United States.

Some participants emphasized that the European Union and the international community have to be more aware of the fact that the region, and especially Serbia, has undergone a transition in the past years.

The international community should not just focus on the dynamics between Kosovo and Serbia and forget smaller countries like Macedonia.

The question arose as to why Kosovo should be regarded as a case *sui generis* that deserves to be treated in exception to international law. Participants rhetorically asked whether or not all Balkan countries have peculiarities, which justify such exceptional treatment as well.

As a lesson of the last fifteen years, the whole region should dedicate itself to the protection of human rights.

The moderator emphasised that the countries of the Western Balkans must not only look to Brussels, but that EU candidate status requires close cooperation between all neighboring countries.

A speaker stated that Serbia was aware of the need for good neighborly relations. He stressed that since the democratic change in 2000 Serbia has treated its neighbors well and has not threatened their territorial integrity. Serbia is looking forward to working with EULEX and wants to do all it can to promote it. Referring to freedom of movement, he expressed the opinion that this right does not exist for a number of Serbs in Kosovo. He pointed to the rendition of Serbian war criminals to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague as proof that the political will for cooperation is present in Serbia.

The next speaker stressed that cooperation between the EU and the United States works well and can be further developed. There was consensus about the fundamental issues and problems of the region. He evaluated Kosovo's progress since it declared independence as astonishing and impressive. He stated that Kosovo's current status is an irreversible fact, which is recognized by the international community in a more and more positive way. In addition, the political transition underway in the United States allows us to take a fresh look at the future of the Western Balkans. Talking about future challenges, the speaker highlighted the impact of the global financial crises on the Western Balkans and the need for energy policy reforms.

The next speaker pointed out some of the global changes that the Balkans were confronted with in the last two decades. The interventions of NATO in the 90s could never have been imagined before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1992, the strong wish to create new nations and states was supported by the international community. In retrospect, this may have been a mistake. Now a number of countries are expected to become part of NATO in the coming years, while relations between Serbia and NATO are rapidly getting worse.

Five member states of the EU have not recognized Kosovo yet. This indicates problems regarding the unity of the member states and their capacity for common action. If Greece and Turkey were able to solve their problems concerning the division of Cyprus, this could be a huge step forward for the recognition of Kosovo. It could lead to recognition by other countries.

It would be good if all the countries of the region could be given EU accession candidate status at the same time. One participant criticized the concentration on timelines for membership; the talk about final status distracts from processes and medium term effects.

The question of EU membership for countries of the Western Balkans is not very popular inside the EU member states and is not a topic by which national elections can be won. The membership of Romania and Bulgaria are regarded as having happened too soon. This implies an increase in the benchmarks for the accession of the Western Balkan countries.

Russia had a phase of political weakness in the 90s. Since this phase ended, Russia has wanted to extend its area of influence and has been frustrated that it does not yet reach Pristina. One participant pointed out that Russia was highly involved in the negotiations about the future status of Kosovo. The question of the status of Kosovo should have been made a subject of the Dayton treaty.

Another participant stated that, by defining non-negotiable criteria such as the prohibition on joining other states or on going back to the status quo that preceded UN resolution 1244 there was no other possibility than to found a new state.

While Kosovo wants to create a climate where all minorities can participate in political life, this is obstructed by Serbian policy, which does not encourage the Serbian minority to take part in political life or to make use of their minority rights. The participant demanded that the EU talk to Serbia.

Several speakers stressed the need to overcome nationalism by developing a culture of citizenship. The region particularly needs experienced and highly skilled people.

One participant pointed out the mistakes that the international community made in crisis management in the 90s. He saw the reasons for nationalism in a lack of democracy in Serbia. According to him, this, as well as the acceptance of an independent Kosovo, still needs time. In his opinion, a clear-cut solution such as that intended by Zoran Djindjić is not possible. At the same time, he referred to the development of Serbia in the past years and pointed out the results of the governmental elections in 2008; to him, they are proof that the Serbians will turn away from nationalism and take the European road.

The arrest and delivery to The Hague of Radovan Karadžić showed that the political will to cooperate exists since the dismissal of Koštunica. He regarded the Hague Tribunal as an important factor for the development of civil society.

One participant maintained that the independence of Kosovo has stabilized the whole region. The importance of



the Kosovo issue for the Serbian population declined heavily during the first year of independence. Consequently, he is optimistic that Serbia is going to go along.

Several participants agreed that Serbia needs time for more self-reflection: the Serbs have to cast off the victim's role and look properly at the past. Serbia must set its sights on the future and move forward. One participant asked the EU to set clear requirements for the enlargement process. Serbia has a positive outlook for the first time in twenty years and should seize this by doing its best to cooperate. At the same time, it is a good moment to address fundamental issues in the region because there is currently a lot of attention on the part of the international community.

#### **Security Policy: The Results of the Bucharest NATO-Summit in the Context of the EU-Enlargement Process in Southeast Europe**

A participant saw NATO integration as a key to accession to the European Union. He criticized Serbia on a number of fronts: In his opinion, Serbia has not contributed to the success of the International War Crime Tribunal by arresting Ratko Mladić. Furthermore, he criticized the lack of recognition of Kosovo and the destabilization of Bosnia-Herzegovina via support to the Republika Srpska. He saw the improvement of the relationship between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as a key factor for the development of the whole region. As long as Serbia rejects such improvement, the accession process both to the EU and NATO will stagnate.

Macedonia was disappointed after the NATO Bucharest summit. The Macedonians themselves were convinced they had done their best to fulfill the accession criteria. The speaker stressed how Macedonia had developed in the past year and its achievements in mitigating the conflict between Slavic Macedonians and the Albanian majority. Moreover, Macedonia takes part in a number of international peacekeeping missions. Since the rejection, the popularity of NATO has decreased markedly in Macedonia. In Macedonia, the question of the country's name is still a big issue. Upon Greece's insistence, Macedonia had to name itself "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Greece still suggests that Macedonia has territorial aspirations towards the northern part of Greece, where a Macedonian minority lives. According to the speaker, the international community has to put pressure on Greece to prevent further

trade blockades. Macedonia fears that Greece will try to prevent Macedonian accession to the European Union by using its veto in the Council of Europe. The difficult geographical position of Macedonia, sharing borders with Kosovo and Serbia, requires EU engagement as a stabilizing factor. Turkey also has territorial struggles with Greece regarding Cyprus, but unlike Macedonia it is a much stronger opponent for Greece.

The next speaker saw a deficit in cooperation between the EU and NATO. Global political challenges and new political and security challenges require that closer cooperation take place. Both organizations should look for new opportunities, for example by developing the Berlin-Plus agreements. The speaker saw a problem in the different approaches regarding security strategy. He stressed that it is not only up to international organizations to mitigate the conflicts in the Western Balkans, but a matter of cooperation between the states of the region as well. He emphasized that the EU has to solve its internal problems in order to be able to handle the problems of the European periphery. The Western Balkans should not only concentrate on their final aim of becoming full members of the Union, but the EU should also offer a close partnership short of full candidate status. The states, which were rejected as NATO members should not focus on their disappointment, but concentrate on the future. Membership should be regarded neither as an ultimate goal nor as an act of charity, but as a reward for progress.

Greece was said to be disappointed that so many nations have recognized Macedonia. The question about the name of Macedonia is still an issue in Greece, so it is not easy for national politicians. Several participants expressed their incomprehension of the importance of the name issue both in Macedonia and Greece. The EU believes the countries should concentrate on their common problems and not focus so much on national state symbols.

While the rejection of Nato membership action plan was a disappointment for Macedonia, it was a historic day for Albania, which is focusing more and more on its future in a productive way. It should be given more positive signals by the EU. Several participants remarked that Albania has implemented important reforms in various sectors.

Reacting to the criticism that the creation of the international court of justice in the Hague took the solution of problems out of the hands of the countries of the region, one participant stressed that this had to be done because the Serbians were unable to solve these problems by themselves.

All participants agreed that issues such as the development of civil society, good governance, anti-corruption-strategies and internal security have to be more developed and accompanied by the EU within a system of checks and balances.

### **Regional Cooperation: Changes and Challenges of local Ownership: Expectations of the Regional Cooperation Council**

The speaker emphasized that conflicts can only be prevented by regional cooperation. He criticized the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina is not involved in the Regional Cooperation Council, which was created after the Kosovo war.

One participant stressed that Bosnia has learned from historic examples and the interventions of the international community over the last two decades. The population, which has experienced enormous periods of suffering, seeks peace and prosperity now. Accession to the EU is regarded as a successful symbol of progress in the country. The country still, however, remains fragile and suffers from political tension. He highlighted the development that Bosnia-Herzegovina has undergone through in the past years, thanks in a large part to close regional cooperation.

One participant remarked that regional cooperation is particularly important in the fight against transnational crime: there are a lot of local criminal networks between Serbia and the Republika Srpska which prevented the arrest of Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić.

While the foundation of the independent state of Kosovo was based on already existing parallel structures, Bosnia-Herzegovina was a completely new country. He praised the Dayton treaty as one of the best peace treaties ever, because every one of the parties had to learn to live with a compromise. In the future, he sees the EU as having a leading role in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the same time he emphasized that Bosnia is becoming more and more able to handle problems on its own.

As far as objectives are concerned, the Western Balkans should evolve a common regional identity, based on their common history and common objectives. One participant pointed out the high level of cooperation between Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. The participants agreed that political regional cooperation still lags behind

and overshadows the future of the Regional Cooperation Council.

The EU should make a higher priority out of regional cooperation, but also make clear that it is not just linked to the EU enlargement process. The history of the European Union itself should be seen as an example for successful regional cooperation regarding trade, investment policy and political coordination.

One participant argued that the countries should, though regional cooperation is an important factor, focus more on the evolution of relations with the EU and NATO. Other participants disagreed.

One participant pointed out the importance of the “peer group effect”: if one of the countries of the region advances, the others go in the same direction. The countries observe each other attentively, mostly with more of a competitive feeling than with one of solidarity.

There are a lot of positive examples of regional cooperation, such as festivals, youth movements, or scientific cooperation. Criticism was aimed at the media in this connection, not even the local media talk about such cooperation. The media, which does not seem to be in favor of regional cooperation, has a negative impact.

The sooner the people of the region come to terms with the past, the sooner they will progress. Germany’s way of dealing with its past over decades was cited as a good example for the Western Balkans. The Hague allows countries to outsource issues that a country should be solving on its own.

### **Joining the West: EU-Enlargement, Market Economy and Energy Security**

While the majority of the population of Kosovo and Albania seems to be enthusiastic about EU membership, many people in Bosnia-Herzegovina feel rejected by Europe. International political and military intervention and the presence of NATO and EU military and civilian troops have mitigated these conflicts. At the same time, the international community is not offering enough opportunities for the region to develop economically.

A participant pointed out that, in order to prevent further repetition of the wars of the 90s, the region must be built up economically. He criticized the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina had, unlike Germany after the Second World War, no Marshall Fund. The whole region lacks economic investment. Economic stability would have a direct impact on the level of investment and can be as important and effective as the international presence.

Again, the lack of regional cooperation inhibits development of a common economic base. The representation of Kosovo in many regional summits is obstructed by Serbia. One participant asked the EU to put more pressure on neighboring countries to recognize Kosovo and pointed out the high expectations Kosovo has of the EU. A young and fragile country like Kosovo needs support to develop its infrastructure.

Another participant stressed that the global financial crisis has to be seen as a possibility to reshape economic structures. The enormous dimensions of the current financial crisis should not make people forget that there are regions in the world, like the Western Balkans, which are growing rapidly.

The speaker pointed out that, even if Kosovo is a small country, it can easily become a flourishing economy. He saw the CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement) program as an important instrument by which to reinforce economic growth in the Western Balkans. He stressed that the United States must watch the process of economic accession to Europe closely.

Several participants stressed that the region, which is doing rather well, has a “marketing problem”. While the population itself feels that the region is developing, people from outside often have the impression that there are only problems emanating from the region. For example the EU, still uses a lot of timeworn data; obviously there is an insufficient realization of the extent to which the region has changed.

One participant stressed the important role of the OSCE in the region. In the last five years the region has seen enormous growth. All the same, there are huge demographic problems facing the whole region, except Kosovo. The very young population of Kosovo constitutes a strategic asset, which no economic plan can replace. Kosovo has huge energy resources, but a fundamental lack of infrastructure.

Several participants agreed that the EU should change its attitude towards labor migration. There was agreement that

freedom of movement and the gradual decline of borders are very important factors for gaining investment from foreign companies.

One participant pointed out that there is regional cooperation fatigue, because the countries start from very different levels and some countries like Bulgaria, Romania or Croatia feel that they are “over the peak”.

For a long time, Germany had the image of not being a country for immigrants. Now it is increasingly looking for qualified immigrants to solve its labor market problems. But Germany is afraid of a flow of immigrants, because there were some who abused German subsidies in the past. In the future, the EU should invest more in the region itself rather than bringing people from the Western Balkans into the EU as cheap labor.

One participant brought up the idea of creating a free trade zone in the region following the model of the EU. This would not only bring the whole region to a higher level, but also make it a lot easier to join the EU afterwards because standards would already have been equalized.

The question of how to fight corruption was discussed. One participant stressed that international organizations were often involved with non-transparent structures. Several participants stressed that countries have to fight corruption on their own and have to learn to develop answers to the existence of parallel criminal structures.

For a very long time, the only functional network in Kosovo was the family – public institutions were regarded as alien. Now it is up to the new government to change this perception, for example by establishing the idea that paying taxes is a duty of citizenship. One participant pointed out the responsibility of the international community. It is regarded as being partly responsible for the lack of rule of law as its main objective was to maintain social peace. For a long time, the international community has feared to take action against criminal structures. ■

Thomas de Maizière, *Federal Minister for Special Tasks  
and Head of the Federal Chancellery*



Prof. Dr. Dr. Hans-Werner Sinn, *President of the ifo-Institute for Economic  
Research in conversation with members of the Friends of the Aspen Institute*



*Lieutenant General (ret.) Ricardo S. Sanchez,  
Commander, Coalition Joint Task Force 7, Iraq*



*Dr. Fritz Oesterle, Chief Executive Officer,  
Cesio AG addressing the Friends of the Aspen Institute*



Dr. Haleh Esfandiari, *Director, Middle East Program,  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*



J. Scott Carpenter, *former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs,*  
*in conversation with the Friends of the Aspen Institute*



Reinhard Bütikofer, *Federal Chairman of Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen* in conversation with a member of the Friends  
of the Aspen Institute

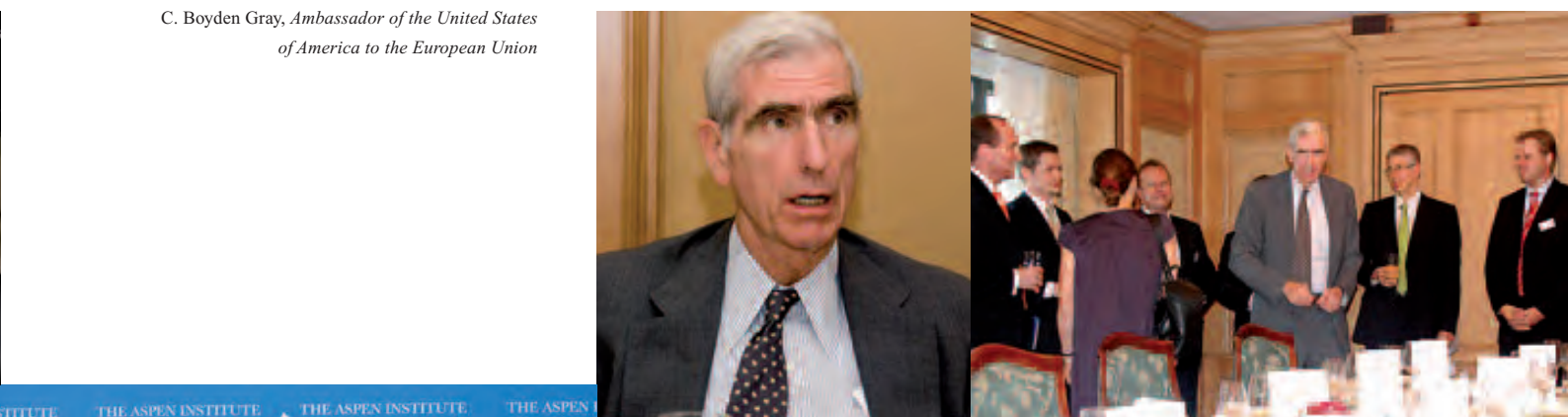




*Dr. Dietrich von Kyaw,  
Ambassador (ret.) of the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Union  
addresses the Friends of the Aspen Institute.*



*C. Boyden Gray, Ambassador of the United States  
of America to the European Union*



*Klaus Wowereit, Governing Mayor of Berlin*



Prof. Dr. Dr. Hans-Werner Sinn, *President of the ifo-Institute for Economic Research*



# PUBLIC PROGRAM OF EVENTS

Aspen's public program consists of a series of breakfast, luncheon and evening meetings with top business and political leaders and policy experts.

The meetings are organized for the larger public with precedence given to the Friends of the Aspen Institute who pay membership dues that are used to defray Aspen's operating costs. Prospective members of the Friends of the Aspen Institute are invited to experience two-to-three events before being asked to decide whether to support Aspen financially.

The events usually entail no more than twenty to thirty attendees who gather to hear a twenty minute presentation by Aspen's guest speaker. The presentation is both preceded and followed by extensive formal and informal conversation periods during which attendees have an opportunity to meet and have a meaningful exchange with Aspen's guest speaker.

Attendance is deliberately restricted to a very small number and is by invitation only.

**For Further Information Contact:**

Anett Sachtleben,  
Aspen Institute Berlin e.V.,  
Inselstrasse 10, 14129 Berlin,  
+49 30 80 48 90 15

*Aspen wishes to express its sincere gratitude to the Shepard Stone Stiftung, The Friends of the Aspen Institute e.V., Mr. Leonard A. Lauder and Ambassador Ronald S. Lauder for making the public program of events possible.*

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**“The Middle East:  
Developments and Challenges”**  
**Director General Aharon Abramovitch,**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel**  
**Lunch Reception and Discussion,**  
**January 16, 2008**

Mr. Abramovitch cited three elements as the basis for beginning the Annapolis process: the dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians, with U.S. support; the desire to resume talks as both sides value the effort to maintain open lines of communication; and, finally, support from the international community. He specifically noted the anticipated impact of support from Arab countries, as they learned from the failed talks in 2000.

**“Iran’s Nuclear Program:  
Necessary Steps to Build Confidence”**  
**Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte, Permanent**  
**Representative of the United States to the**  
**United Nations, Vienna**  
**Roundtable and Reception,**  
**January 26, 2008**

Ambassador Schulte opened his remarks by underscoring the need to practice caution when reading U.S. National Intelligence Estimates, which summarize key findings regarding Iran’s nuclear capabilities and intentions. He emphasized the need to read the footnotes, which still describe Iran as a threat to international security. In his concluding statements, Ambassador Schulte called on the international community to exercise diplomatic pressure in hope of developing a peaceful solution.

**“The Role of Women in Iran’s Civil Society”**  
**Dr. Haleh Esfandiari,**  
**Director of the Middle East Program,**  
**Woodrow Wilson International Center for**  
**Scholars, Washington, D.C.**  
**Roundtable and Reception,**  
**January 31, 2008**

Dr. Esfandiari offered a brief history of the Iranian women’s movement since the 1979 Revolution. Public discourse is characterized by “red lines” that cannot be crossed. Discussion of sexuality is out of bounds, and so is criticizing Islam or the *hijab* laws. What makes the subjects taboo is, to a large extent, the regime’s fear that Islam and feminism might “join forces.” If the feminists can portray themselves as authentically Islamic, they may be able to drive a wedge between Iran’s state and religious authorities. Ahmedinejad’s strategy is the reverse: by linking feminism with the ‘heretical West,’ he turns patriarchy and Iranian patriotism into forms of piety.

**“World Power India -  
The New Challenge for the West”**  
**Dr. Olaf Ihlau, Journalist, Former Foreign**  
**Editor of “Der Spiegel”**  
**Roundtable and Reception,**  
**February 14, 2008**

Mr. Ihlau’s remarks focused on excerpts from his newest book, entitled *World Power India - The New Challenge for the West*. He described India’s rise to economic preeminence as a new challenge for western economies, one superseding previous claims that China would pose the greatest challenge in the 21st century. Mr. Ihlau called attention to those members of society who fail to reap the benefits of socioeconomic success; a problem that is magnified by India’s booming demographic numbers. During the ensuing discussion, Mr. Ihlau offered his forecast as to how rapid growth will continue to shape the many facets of today’s modern India.

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**“Egypt’s Role in the Broader Middle East”**

**H.E. Mohamed Al-Orabi, Ambassador  
of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Federal  
Republic of Germany**

**Aspen Junior Fellows Discussion,  
March 11, 2008**

Stressing the shared border between Egypt and the Palestinian territories, Ambassador Al-Orabi cited tangible examples of international interest in the peace process in Gaza, in particular, Egypt’s support of all factions’ active involvement in negotiations. He addressed the significance of creating open channels of dialogue with the Syrian government, as part of the solution to achieving political reform within the region.

**“The U.S. Market and U.S. Capital Market  
Regulations”**

**Paul S. Atkins, Commissioner,  
U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission  
CEO / CFO Breakfast, March 12, 2008**

While access to the U.S. markets is vital to many German companies, obstacles and prospective obstacles are often difficult to evaluate. Commissioner Atkins agreed to discuss key problems of this important issue with selected representatives of German trade and industry, providing insight into U.S. capital market regulations, evaluation processes and market organization.

**“The Transatlantic Partnership and the  
Future of German-American Relations”**

**Bundesminister Dr. Thomas de Maizière,  
Head of the Federal Chancellery,**

**Roundtable and Reception, May 15, 2008**

Dr. de Maizière emphasized three main issues in his speech: globalization, climate change and security. He highlighted China and India as upcoming global economic players and stressed the importance and the positive results of the G8-summit in Heiligendamm in the context of addressing climate change. De Maizière emphasized the importance of the German military contribution in Afghanistan as vital to worldwide security. Finally he clarified that only a durable partnership between the U.S. and ‘Old Europe’ can produce reliable solutions for global issues.

**“Green Growth”**

**Reinhard Bütikofer, Federal Chairman,  
Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen**

**Roundtable and Reception, June 19, 2008**

Mr. Bütikofer emphasized the fact that the free market economy needs to adopt a new approach, which incorporates not only social but also ecological aspects. If this is not the case, climate change will have considerable economic impact, which might even lead to economic stagnation, as seen in China (where damage caused to the environment equals the nominal economic growth). Therefore, a fundamental change in economic parameters is crucial. By the end of the 21st century renewable energy sources must, according to Bütikofer, replace fossil fuels. Bütikofer’s remarks were followed by a lively discussion.

**“The U.S.-EU Economic Relationship”**

**C. Boyden Gray, U.S. Special Envoy for European Union Affairs**

**Roundtable and Reception, June 26, 2008**

Ambassador Gray offered his insights on U.S.-EU economic relations and global financial security, including the rise in energy costs and its repercussions on global finance. He discussed issues such as climate change, energy security and the changing political climate in the U.S. and Germany in connection with the upcoming elections in 2008 and 2009. The political and economic impact of the energy shift from oil and gas to renewable sources such as biomass, ethanol, biofuels and solar energy was also discussed. Gray emphasized the need to harness technological progress in order to tackle climate change.

**“Liberty’s Best Hope”**

**Kim R. Holmes, Vice President of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, The Heritage Foundation**

**Dinner Roundtable and Discussion\*, July 3, 2008**

This event brought together German politicians, members of the media, senior experts and distinguished colleagues from German companies and organizations interested in furthering transatlantic cooperation. Holmes addressed major themes such as advancing American leadership and improving global and national security as discussed in his latest publication *Liberty’s Best Hope*. He presented his views on strategic independence as a stimulus for responsible leadership in democratic organizations on both national and international levels.

*\*In Cooperation with The Hanns-Seidel Foundation*

**“Taking the Temperature of the Transatlantic Relationship”**

**Dana Rohrbacher, Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

**U.S. House of Representatives Dinner and Discussion, August 19, 2008**

This by-invitation-only dinner consisted of a *tour d’horizon* of current challenges in the transatlantic relationship, with a particular focus on Russia and Afghanistan.

**“Islamic Movements in the Arab World – Future Partners or Enemies?”**

**Dr. Amr Hamzawy, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., USA**

**Reception and Roundtable Discussion, September 9, 2008**

Dr. Hamzawy argued in his presentation that there are many kinds of Islamist groups and thus, the West would be wrong to simply dismiss them all as being anti-American and violence-prone. Instead, western governments should start to understand that Islamist groups command significant support among the general public and that condemning them does not bring stability to the Arab world. Hamzawy called for a policy of “moderation through participation”, meaning that by accepting the active engagement of moderate Islamist groups in Arab societies, the West will eventually observe that these groups will de-radicalize and become a legitimate part of the political process in their countries.

**“No Bread for the World?  
Causes and Effects of the Latest Global  
Famine”**

**Alexander Müller, Deputy Director General  
of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization,  
Rome, Prof. Dirk Messner, Director Deutsches  
Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, Dr. Amr  
Hamzawy, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endow-  
ment for International Peace, Washington DC.,  
Golineh Atai, Foreign Correspondent ARD,  
Cairo**

**Roundtable Discussion, Cologne\*,  
September 11, 2008**

The discussants argued that famine is caused by unequal distribution, corruption, social injustice and power-hungry elites in affected countries. The presenters pointed out the interrelationship between energy prices and rising food prices. Moreover, the role of climate change was emphasized and it was asserted that future debate will increasingly revolve around the scarcity of cultivatable land around the globe. Proposals for solutions to the crisis included demands for global land-management and the fair distribution of land, more investment in the agricultural economy, and the strengthening of local activist groups in order to fight hunger.

*\*In cooperation with the Dellbrücker Forum*

**“Iraq – Retrospective and Perspective”**

**Lieutenant General (Ret.)**

**Ricardo S. Sanchez, Commander, Coalition  
Joint Task Force 7, Iraq**

**Receptions and Roundtables,  
Frankfurt\*\*, Düsseldorf\*\*\*, Berlin,  
September 21 & 22, 2008**

At all three well-attended events, Lieutenant General Sanchez offered a personal account of his time as commander of coalition forces in Iraq. General Sanchez stressed the issues facing civil - military coordination in addressing post-conflict stabilization challenges that have occurred in the eight or more post-conflict interventions on the part of the international community since the end of the Cold War. General Sanchez stressed the importance of working together to achieve a more effective international approach in order to be able to achieve better results in future interventions, and in Afghanistan as well.

*\*\* In cooperation with the Union International Club e.V.*

*\*\*\* In cooperation with the Industrie-Club e.V.*

**“After the Irish ‘No’ Vote: What Next for the  
European Unification Process?”**

**Ambassador Dr. Dietrich von Kyaw,  
Former Ambassador of the Federal Republic  
of Germany to the European Union**

**Roundtable and Reception,  
September 30, 2008**

After giving a short historical overview of EU developments, Dr. von Kyaw evaluated the effects of Ireland’s recent ‘no’ vote and its impact on the implementation of the Lisbon treaty. According to von Kyaw, the crisis that arose from Ireland’s rejection of the Lisbon treaty is manageable and the EU has already shown its capacity to solve crises several times in the past. To find a solution this time, Ireland has to explain the reasons why it rejected the treaty. Based on that, compromises can be reached, for example through incorporating exceptions, differentiations and so-called opt-outs in the EU treaty. Von Kyaw emphasized the lack of alternatives to the European integration process, due to the new challenges that the transatlantic community faces. The European Union’s soft power, for example, is important for international stability. Thus, von Kyaw concluded, an agreement with Ireland has to be found eventually.

**“Germany: Ways Out of the Crisis?”**

**Dr. Fritz Oesterle, CEO, Celesio AG**

**Aspen Business Roundtable,  
October 23, 2008**

Dr. Oesterle gave a presentation on the current financial crisis, pointing out its underlying causes, such as the failure of governments and institutions to regulate and check financial organizations, the absence of global regulatory standards, and missing state control over rating agencies and their reliability. Dr. Oesterle gave a positive evaluation of the German government’s rescue package depicting it as a manner for the state to act in the same fashion as an ordinary market participant by gaining profits through investment. This development could reestablish and strengthen public trust in the market economy.

**Dr. Thilo Sarrazin,**  
Finanzsenator, State Government of the  
Federal State of Berlin  
**Dr. Bernd Pfaffenbach,**  
Career State Secretary in the Federal  
Ministry for Economy and Technology  
**Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble,**  
Federal Minister of the Interior,  
Federal Republic of Germany  
**Paul Achleitner,**  
Chief Financial Officer, Allianz SE  
**Walter Isaacson,**  
President and Chief Executive Officer,  
The Aspen Institute (U.S.A)  
Gala Dinner Schloß Charlottenburg,  
October 27, 2008

In honor of the first joint meeting of the boards of trustees of The Aspen Institute (U.S.A) and The Aspen Institute Germany in over thirty years, and on the occasion of the Berlin meeting of the international committee of the board of the Aspen Institute, The Aspen Institute Germany hosted a cocktail reception, organ concert and gala dinner for board members from Aspen France, Italy, Romania, Japan and India, as well as thirty-seven U.S. board members and their spouses in Berlin's historic Schloß Charlottenburg. After the champagne reception and concert in the historical section of the castle, Dr. Thilo Sarrazin, Dr. Bernd Pfaffenbach and Paul Achleitner addressed Aspen's one hundred and fifty guests from German industry, politics and academia on various aspects of the global financial crisis and of the financial situation of the city of Berlin during a dinner in the castle's Orangery. Federal Minister of the Interior Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble addressed the guests on the state of the transatlantic relationship, while Mr. Isaacson welcomed a new era of cooperation between the Aspen Institutes in Europe and the United States of America.

**"Taking Stock of U.S. Democracy Promotion  
in the Middle East.  
Seven Years Later: Back to Realism?"**  
**J. Scott Carpenter, Keston Family Fellow,  
Washington Institute for Near East Policy,  
Director of Project "Fikra"**  
Dinner and Discussion\*, November 19, 2008

Former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State J. Scott Carpenter took stock of the progress of and challenges to the democratization policy of U.S. President, George W. Bush. Carpenter argued that U.S. democracy promotion in the Middle East has not been a complete failure. He pointed out that Iraq and Afghanistan today are in a better condition than they were before the international interventions. According to Carpenter, the wrong terminology was used to justify intervention in the region. Instead of using intelligence reports as a basis for military action, the international community should have said that it wanted to 'liberate' Afghanistan as well as Iraq. Regarding the future of U.S. policy in the Middle East, Carpenter argued that isolationism will not be an option for the next U.S. government. Interventions around the globe need U.S. support for credibility and success. A friendly, but spirited, exchange ensued after the presentation on the proper approach to promoting greater pluralism in the Broader Middle East and on the basis for the *realpolitik* underlying the Bush administration's policy.

\* In cooperation with the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V.*



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**“The Economic Outlook After the Financial Crisis”**

**Prof. Dr. Dr. Hans-Werner Sinn,  
President, Ifo Institute for Economic Research**

**Lecture and Reception,  
December 3, 2008**

Professor Sinn examined the causes and effects of the global financial and economic crisis. The main reason for the crisis is the limitation of liability, according to which creditors of corporate businesses cannot access the personal property of the owner of these businesses. This led to an excessive willingness to take risk on the part of investors and led to a tendency to choose high-risk projects with huge potential profits, because the investors did not have to shoulder possible losses. Sinn identified the failure of rating agencies as well as competition between regulatory authorities around the world to retain their attractiveness for banks as other reasons for the financial crisis. By way of conclusion, Sinn proposed a number of measures to manage the crisis. First of all, the limitation of liability legislation for corporate businesses needs to be better defined by determining strict minimum requirements for equity capital. Moreover, there needs to be an international harmonization of banking regulations, to avoid competition among states. Additionally, Sinn argued that banks should be forced to accept state rescue packages, in order to avoid further reductions of business volume of crippled banks.

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**“Relations between the European Union and the United States of America”**

**Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering,  
President of the European Parliament**

**Lecture and Reception,  
December 5, 2008**

A reception was held for the Friends of Aspen Germany in honor of The Aspen Institute’s guests attending the policy program conference titled “A New Transatlantic Dialogue: German and U.S. Leaders in Dialogue with the Balkans”. President Pöttering provided a very optimistic outlook for U.S.-EU relations throughout his presentation. He argued that Obama’s election as U.S. President offers a serious chance both to build solid, effective relations between the United States and the European Union as genuine and equal partners, and to work proactively together on the many challenges that lie ahead. Pöttering emphasized that continuing problems such as climate change, energy security, the Middle East, terrorism and international crime require policy-makers and legislators to work together on an international scale. If the EU and the US can do this successfully, they could be a major force for prosperity, peace and civilized values in an increasingly unstable world. President Pöttering concluded by saying a few words on the European Union’s enlargement policy with a special view to the Western Balkans. He pointed out the strategic importance that countries in the Western Balkans have for the EU - for its stability, security, energy supplies and contacts in the region.

## KEY STAFF



**Charles King Mallory IV** | Executive Director – Mr. Mallory received his education at Volksschule in Hamburg, at Westminster School, London and at Middlebury College, Vermont; he studied for an MA in International Relations at Johns Hopkins University and a PhD at the RAND Graduate School. Mr. Mal-

lory worked at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and at Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, where he co-wrote the “Role of Chemical Weapons in Soviet Military Doctrine” with Professor J. Krause of Kiel University. Mr. Mallory was CEO of Credit Suisse Investment Funds Moscow before joining Allied Capital Corporation - a private equity and mezzanine investment fund. For the five years prior to joining Aspen he was Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.



**Dr. Benjamin Schreer** | Deputy Director – Dr. Schreer joined Aspen as the Deputy Director in March 2009. Prior to his appointment, he was a research fellow in the research unit “Atlantic and European Security” at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft

und Politik, SWP) in Berlin (2003-2008), and co-leader of a research group in the Centre of Excellence at Constance University (2008-2009). He received his doctoral degree in Political Science from Kiel University and holds an MA in Political Science, English Literature and German Literature from the same university. Dr. Schreer has published widely on international security and defense policy issues.



**Olaf Böhnke** | Senior Program Officer – Mr. Böhnke currently leads Aspen’s Iran program. Before joining Aspen in January 2007, he was chief of staff and senior advisor to several members of the German Bundestag from 1999-2006. Mr Böhnke is also a visiting lecturer at the Otto-Suhr-Institut for

Political Sciences at Free University, Berlin. He received his M.A. from Free University, Berlin, where he studied International Relations, Political Science and Economics.



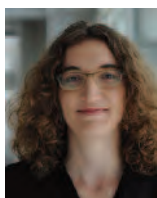
**Arzu Celep** | Development Assistant – Ms. Celep joined Aspen in January 2009. She received her BA in International Relations from the University of Sussex and her MSc in Violence, Conflict and Development from the School of Oriental and Asian Studies at London University.

The focus areas of her studies were: conflict resolution in developing countries and international security studies. Following her studies she gained work experience in the political unit of the European Commission in Berlin and at the German Institute for Economic Research. Before starting at the Aspen Institute, Ms. Celep worked at the Military Department of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Berlin.



**Frangis Dadfar Spanta** | Program Officer – Ms. Spanta joined Aspen in November 2008. She graduated in 2007 with a Magister Artium in Islamic Studies/Oriental Philology, Political Science and German Philology from University of Cologne. During the course of her studies at the Universities of Muenster,

Birmingham and Cologne, she gained fundamental expertise in the Middle East and Central Asian region. After her return from field study and a Chinese language course in Beijing in July 2008, she joined the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University to prepare the Afghanistan Review Conference in Bonn/Petersberg, Germany.



**Eva Dingel** | Senior Program Officer – Ms. Dingel joined Aspen in July 2008. She received her BA in Modern European Studies from University College, London, and an MA in International Relations from Free University, Berlin. She worked as project assistant in Beirut, Lebanon with the Friedrich Naumann

Foundation as well as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation before joining Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Berlin as research assistant to the Director. Her research focus is on the role of non-state actors in the Middle East. Her regional experience also includes stays in Israel and Syria.



**Ramona Gottwald** | Program Assistant – After studying commercial correspondence for foreign languages, Ms. Gottwald worked in a conference centre. After earning Certification as an International Event Manager, she worked for a Czech Non-Governmental Organization in 2007 before joining Aspen in

January, 2008

**Anna Korte** | Program Officer – Ms. Korte earned her Masters Degree in Political Science, German, and Art History at the University of Regensburg. During the course of her studies, she gained practical experience in Mauritania in developmental aid and worked as a project assistant in the United States section of the Herbert Quandt Foundation in Munich. After her

studies, she worked as a junior consultant for a strategy consulting company in Cologne with a focus on implementing corporate ethics and compliance, defining corporate identities, and designing business communication campaigns.



**Anett Sachtleben** | Executive Assistant to the Director – Ms. Sachtleben joined Aspen in July 2008 and manages the public program of events. She studied at the University of Nottingham, England, where she obtained a BA in Politics and a Masters degree in International Relations. Her academic focus

was on U.S. politics and international security and terrorism studies. Before working at the Aspen Institute, Ms. Sachtleben gained practical experience at a local newspaper's editorial office and at a Consulting Company in Istanbul, Turkey.



**Helena Zillich** | Development Officer – Ms. Zillich joined Aspen in January 2007 after completing her MA in Economics from the University Zurich in 2005. Her previous work experience led her to southern India where she worked for the Indian development organization DPG. She also worked for a member of

the Committee on Economic Cooperation & Development at the German Bundestag and gained practical experience at the German Chamber of Commerce in the Caribbean.

# COOPERATION PARTNERS

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The Aspen Institute Germany would like to express its profound thanks to the following partners with whom the institute has cooperated to organize events:

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**The Aspen Institute, USA**  
**Clovek v tísní, o.p.s (People in Need)**  
**Dellbrücker Forum**  
**Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik, e.V., Berlin**  
**Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt**  
**Embassy of the State of Israel**  
**Embassy of the United States of America**  
**The Hanns-Seidel Foundation**  
**The Heinrich Böll Foundation**  
**Industrie-Club e.V., Düsseldorf**  
**Institute of Social Sciences, Christian Albrechts University, Kiel**  
**Lebanese Axis Association for an Inclusive Citizenship (Hayya Bina)**  
**Union International Club e.V., Frankfurt am Main**

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# 2009 TENTATIVE PUBLIC PROGRAM

January		April	
09	Reception and Roundtable Discussion Dr. Paul Salem, Director, Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut	01-03	Middle East Policy Program Conference
		03	Middle East Policy Program Reception
22-25	Middle East Policy Program Conference	22-24	Middle East Policy Program Strategy Meeting
		24	Middle East Policy Program Reception
February		28	Reception and Discussion “Dealing with the Communist Past in the United Germany” Rainer Eppelmann, Chairman of the Management Board of the Federal Foundation for Dealing with the SED Dictatorship
11-13	Middle East Policy Program Conference		
12	Middle East Policy Program Reception		
19	Aspen Business Roundtable Klaus-Peter Müller, Chairman of the Board of Managing Directors, Commerzbank AG		
March		May	
		07	Aspen European Leadership Program Reception
26	Aspen Business Roundtable Håkan Samuelsson, Chairman of the Management Board, MAN AG	07-09	Aspen European Leadership Program Conference
		25	Aspen Business Roundtable René Obermann, Chairman of the Management Board, Deutsche Telekom AG
		June	
		01-07	Aspen European Strategy Forum Preparatory Conference
		14-16	Middle East Policy Program Conference
		15	Dr. Manfred Bischoff, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of Daimler AG, “The Future of the Automobile”
		16	Middle East Policy Program Reception
		30	Aspen Business Roundtable Dr. Josef Ackermann, Chairman of the Board and of the Group Executive Committee, Deutsche Bank AG



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**July**

- 01-03** Middle East Policy Program Conference
- 03** Middle East Policy Program Reception
- 04** Annual Summer Party
- 22-24** Middle East Policy Program Conference
- 24** Middle East Policy Program Reception

**August**

- 30** Aspen European Seminar Begins

**September**

- 06** Aspen European Seminar Ends
- 09-11** Middle East Policy Program Congress
- 11** Middle East Policy Program Reception
- 23-25** Middle East Policy Program Conference
- 25** Middle East Policy Program Reception

<b>October</b>		<b>Reception and Discussion</b>
<b>03</b>	Tag der deutschen Einheit Reception	Dr. Wolfgang Gerhardt, (MdB), Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation
<b>14-16</b>	Middle East Policy Program Conference	Roland Koch, Ministerpräsident (CDU) Hessen
<b>16</b>	Middle East Policy Program Reception	Günther H. Oettinger, Ministerpräsident (CDU) of Baden-Württemberg
<b>22-24</b>	Aspen European Leadership Program Conference	
<b>November</b>		<b>Aspen Business Roundtable</b>
		Paul Achleitner, CEO Allianz SE
		Dr. Thomas Enders, CEO Airbus S.A.S
<b>05-06</b>	Aspen European Strategy Forum, Berlin	
<b>05</b>	Aspen European Strategy Forum, Reception	
<b>December</b>		
<b>06-08</b>	Middle East Policy Program Conference	
<b>08</b>	Middle East Policy Program Reception	

*Note: Due to the responsibilities, workload and ever-changing demands on the time of the individuals in question, we ask for your understanding for the fact that the schedule given above is – at best – tentative and is subject to change*

## **IMPRINT**

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