

## **Politics and Civil Society: The role of NGOs and Political Parties**

Gummersbach, Germany, 18<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> July 2010

### **Overall view:**

The seminar held at Gummersbach, Germany from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of July dealt mainly with the role of political parties and NGOs in a society and the means of cooperation between the two entities. The seminar explored characteristics of NGOs and parties, their strengths and weaknesses' and how cooperation between them benefits a liberal society in particular and the common good in general.

### **Methodology:**

The seminar relied on cooperative contribution from the participants as the main tool of the education. Participants were encouraged to share their experiences from their countries with the others. They offered assessments of their work, and allowed the other participants to gain some insight into the experiences of NGOs and political parties in different countries. There were also lectures by experts on various issues concerning the main topic of the seminar and a field trip to witness firsthand applications on the ground of the theories studied.

### **Description of training:**

The training consisted of two parts; the first part that took place in the first week was mostly theoretical. The participants introduced their NGOs and Political parties, discussed the work they do, the difficulties they face, and the successes and failures they endured. The first week also included lectures about the definition and history of NGOs and Political parties, their significance and legitimacy, their public image and their methods of networking. There were lectures about the specificity of the German NGOs and political parties and their role in German society.

The Participants working in groups were assigned several tasks; one was to explore the distinguishing features between NGOs and Political parties, the second one was to discuss the expectations of NGOs and political parties and determine if they were allies or foes, and the third one encouraged the working groups to find areas of cooperation between the two.

The Second week consisted of the field trip to Weimar, Buchenwald, Dresden and Erfurt. The main aim of the trip was to give the participants a closer look at the German civil society, to witness firsthand success stories of NGOs and political parties in Saxony. The trip also was a great opportunity for the participants to experience German history and culture.

The seminar concluded with participants formulating a strategic plan for cooperation between their NGO and Political Party in their respective countries. The plans were then presented to the whole group with input from the moderators.

The only thing I think the training needed is an introductory session on Liberalism, because it was apparent during the seminar that different people define liberalism differently. I commend the inclusion of the strategic planning session because it was an effective tool to achieve the ultimate goal of the seminar.

### **Palestine participation:**

Palestine was represented with only one member of an NGO, Freedom Forum/ Palestine instead of two participants due to a family issue. There was an introductory presentation about FFP activities, its mission and the difficulties it faces in Palestine. Palestine was an active participant of all the working groups, the dialogue between the moderators and the participants and extra activities that took place in the Academy and during the field trip (except the football games of course!). Palestine was paired with

Indonesia for the final assignment, formulating the strategic plan for cooperation between NGO and a political party, that plan was voted second best by the moderators and the participants.

**Accommodations and Location:**

Both were superb. The idea of having the Academy in a quite peaceful location is an excellent one, it allowed for a suitable atmosphere for research and studying. The accommodations and the food were excellent, the dedicated staff at the Academy worked tirelessly to provide a comfortable environment for the participants and the food was various, plenty and really good. The accommodations during the field trip were also very good; the hotel in Dresden was fantastic in location, cleanliness, and food.

**Moderators, facilitators, assistants, Interpreters:**

Dr. Freier and Mr. Haider were crucial for the success of this seminar. They managed the sessions efficiently ensuring that time was not wasted, they offered substantive input and critique, and they helped make the general atmosphere congenial and relaxed. Above all, they managed to deliver the main aim of the seminar to the participants.

Ms.Pabst and the interpreters were also very helpful in providing assistance with the small logistical details and in helping communications with non English speakers.

**Conclusion:**

The seminar achieved its goal of affirming that cooperation between NGOs and Political parties is possible and crucial. The participants were trained to design strategies to achieve that goal.

From a Palestinian perspective, the role of NGOs and Political parties gets blurry sometimes due to the political situation. The seminar helped me see the opportunities to do some great work in the Palestinian territory, especially with parties that may seem different in an ideological prism. The goal in the end is to serve societies and spread liberal ideas, thus cooperation is needed.

**Personal Reflection:**

Beyond the great knowledge I acquired in this seminar which I discussed above, I will cherish the people I got to know the most. Seeing the common ground between liberal activists from Latin America to Africa to East Europe to Asia to the Middle East affirms the unity of goal for all liberals. Our group had great chemistry, energy and enthusiasm despite the apparent differences, even the lonely non English speaker from Russia found a way to bond with the rest of the group. The continuous dialogue between the participants during and between the plenary sessions did not only expand my views of world issues but fostered friendships with people that are dedicated to the common cause of freedom and liberty.

Lastly, the visit to Dresden was very moving, seeing the beautiful historical city after the destruction of the events of February 1945 gave me great hope that nothing is impossible for my own country. The way the society stood together to rebuild the city symbolized the Church of our Lady reconstruction project was great example of courage, determination and civic engagement.

Enass Tinah  
Ramallah/Palestine, 2010

**Photos :**







Dresden