

Working Group Warsaw Human Dimension OSCE/ODIHR

Session 4

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The Institute for Go-Governance is engaged in promoting good governance (quality democracy) via various projects eg in the Black Sea region with conferences and publications, in the West Balkans and in former countries of the Soviet Union but also assessing the state of democratic governance in more mature democracies in Western Europe.

Quality governance involves a development of mere quantitative democracy ie an extension of the right to vote to more people and progresses to look at how effective institutions such as political parties, parliament, ministries are functioning and what possibilities there are between elections to express views, protest and bring about policy changes. This requires an open media, an opposition free to operate and a mature public able to articulate without fear of reprisals.

Clearly we cannot measure on a one to one basis the developments or problems facing mature democracies with those in for example Belarus. A blanket condemnation of a country as hopeless authoritarianism and similar labels does little to encourage genuine civil society work going on in difficult circumstances. The release of political prisoners is a good sign that the country is sensitive to the image it has in the international community but should not be carried out as a cosmetic pre-election move - sustainability for free opposition work should be demonstrated.

It is all important however to recognise the endemic political culture and these can be changed and do develop. There should be mutual confidence and trust between the leaders and the voters so both are free from fear of what might happen if democratic governance is furthered. The experience and best practices of different countries can help but countries have to find their own ways with experts on the ground. Not one size fits all but the individual approach requires more time, more patience and above all extra funding. However we should not leave good projects and initiatives stranded without hope. In this sense initiatives giving credit where it is due in countries like Belarus and identifying civil society progress are important whilst at the same time not overlooking the very real problems.

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