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Conclusions and Recommendations of Kolkata Conference

EURASIA-Net Deliverable No.20

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Introduction

During its tenure, the project undertaken by its partners and associates from various parts of Europe and South Asia reached certain conclusions and made certain recommendations extensively discussed during the Kolkata Final Conference. The key concepts and the discussion followed form different sections of the present deliverable and of EURASIA-Net Deliverable No.5 “Joint Research Agenda”.

Remarks on project activities

- The emphasis on early stage researchers participating in the Study Visit programme was discussed in depth at the Kolkata conference in March 2010 as an effective way to promote the joint research agenda and also to span a research career from the outset, letting the early stage researchers learn from their South Asian / European partners. Indeed, those participants who are at an early stage of their career benefited from the expertise and knowledge of their host institutions and this has subsequently guided their research perspectives and encouraged a network of young scholars having contacts in South Asia / Europe.
- It was felt that there should be appropriate initiatives to make Summer Schools sustainable and the duration should be longer – even making room for repeat visits. There are also suggestions for research follow up with ‘good’ participants and to initiate the launch of scholarships to selected participants so this can pave the way for more research endeavors. The exchange between Europe and South Asia worked well and should be taken forward.
- It was stated how participants have gained personally from cooperating in this network – particularly the opportunity to learn from expert practitioners. It was noted that this was the first attempt to combine research on Europe and south Asia on such a large scale despite grave challenges. The important point of focus was that even Europe can learn from South Asia, particularly India. This solely could be conceptualized, specifically how experiences shared and transferred in both directions and pave the way for mutual learning. It is also imperative to conceptualize trans-nationality within research agenda, especially in the context of new minorities in Europe with trans-national links to South Asia. It is also important to recognize where European policy and strategy could be a useful instrumental in South Asia and when it should not interfere. The mutual approach to the sharing of

knowledge, and the resolution of conflict within crossborder minorities is a key area, which is becoming a predominant concern of the international community. Furthermore, research carried out by scholars undertaking the study visit programme highlighted the necessity for non-interference, especially in, for example, the CHT in Bangladesh. NGOs highlighted the necessity to approach minority protection from a “bottom-up” approach, rather than a “top-down” approach in which international and regional human rights norms and practice were applied. The gap in perception between the developed and post-colonial world e.g. group v individual rights, impact of globalization, emergence of new minorities (immigrants) etc needs to be recognized when establishing a formal joint research agenda between Europe and South Asia.

- Recognition of sensitivity is also needed towards territorial integrity and cultural issues in the South Asian context. Participants also discussed how information could be produced regarding tension between having rulebook rights and realization of rights and difference between designing legislation and putting it into practice. Specific areas were identified where regions can learn from each other; for example the Indian example of affirmative action can be a learning point for Europe in its approach to inclusivity .
- Five key issues or challenges were also discussed:
 - a. Developing a comparative perspective between both Europe and South Asia— This is a difficult but important step.
 - b. Stress was put on globalization and trans-nationality, and inter-relations, especially relating to diasporas communities.
 - c. It is essential to look not just at particular minorities, but also at mutuality between diverse minority groups.
 - d. There should be an inter-disciplinary approach. Rights cannot be confined to one discipline solely.
 - e. There is difficulty in de-complicating and unpacking an otherwise complex situation.
- The moderators also brought into focus the suggestions that were discussed during the meeting. Firstly, an agreed research policy and a trans – national platform beyond the life of project should be established. Secondly, formalized processes to foster and support universities in Europe and South Asia should be agreed and promoted on a wider scale (using, for example, SASNET as a model). The European

Union should fund and open centre for peace studies in South Asia in order to promote collaboration and raise awareness. Third, although the EURASIA-Net project maintained good contact with the European Commission, the project should also have sent publications and reports to South Asian government agencies to inform research policies and agendas.

- Publications which were produced within EURASIA-Net were of three kinds: scientific articles or publications, educational materials and materials for specialized media. Stress was given on the need to produce other tools of documentation in addition to classical approach of articles for academic publication. It was felt that this would allow research to reach wider audience. There was also interesting suggestion that research data could also be utilized in creative ways like for example, to make documentary films. The same data could also be used to produce multiple outputs. In this way data could be used for dual purposes and readers would also be highly benefited as there would be better access to the findings. Cross-cutting work was considered as more interesting than analyzing issues country by country, particularly given the project's focus on regional collaboration.
- A consensus has emerged that the Trans-national platform should be continued beyond the life of EURASIA-Net project. It is necessary to foster and support formalized cooperation between universities in Europe and South Asia. European Union should fund and open centre for peace studies in South Asia in order to promote collaboration and raise awareness. It was also realized that cooperation with the officials is a crucial aspect. Hence continuous cooperation should be recommended to E.U. The platform that the project has successfully established could turn out to be a possible training centre for EU officials going onto missions in South Asia. It was brought into forefront that a lot of rich data has been collected. So in each member state there should be an information point collecting, and reports should be sent each year to European Commission. This should exist in the South Asian states as well. European Commission or European Union, before announcing a new programme should consult with South Asian agencies to identify genuine needs first. Again, there should be consultation between European and South Asian agencies and a contact book should be there which would have the details of all important agencies or people of the region.
- It was suggested that the way EU judges standards and criteria could also be implemented in the South Asian context especially with the advent of the Lisbon Treaty, there is now a constitutional principle relating to the resolution of conflict

and promotion of peaceful coexistence within EU Member States; the first objective of the European Union being to promote peace (TEU article 3-1). However in the context of South Asia there remains a fear of demand for self-determination from groups. South Asia has an imbalance in power in the case of India. In contrast there is no single state dominance in Europe. Rather there are more power 'blocks' and contextual considerations. So it is not possible at the moment to draft a SAARC document based on framework convention as SAARC is a weak platform for these kinds of legal measure. Participants also suggested a concrete position from SAARC on issues of refugees, disaster relief etc. A possibility is also there of enabling taskforce to intervene in these issues or events. This could turn out to be the starting point of enhancing regional cooperation on humanitarian aids and security, which could again be extended to include issues of minority protection. However things should be ushered in gradually as to be too demanding could turn into counterproductive. Incremental approach is preferred which would probably be more effective. Tradition of bilateral treaties should remain important in formulating solutions.

Recommendations on Trans-Regional Platform

The following points form part of the recommendations for EURASIA-Net follow up activities, with special regard to the Trans-Regional Platform:

- a. The need for platforms at both governmental and societal level should be taken into account. Governmental rights, conventions and regional inter-governmental agreements should also be considered.
- b. Human Rights groups have tried to create such platforms independently as discussed earlier. One has to take lessons from these efforts and appreciate strengths and weaknesses.
- c. We have to recognize the gap in perception between the developed and post-colonial world, like for example, group versus individual rights, and impact of globalization and emergence of new minorities (e.g. migrants).
- d. The principle of autonomy is linked to federalism and devolution.
- e. In sustaining such a programme as this, virtual (web) links may not be enough. We should begin with modest goals and build on them. There should be movement between regions and an inventory of shared resources. He also proposed a web based trans-regional journal of minority rights as that would help the cause to a great extent.
- f. The networks which already exist should be checked and with which this platform can align needs to be examined.
- g. Individuals involved in the programme should be counted as network resources.
- h. We should institutionalize our work and the platform.
- i. Trans-regional journal on minority issues should be initiated to ease cooperation and meeting between partners.
- j. Refugees, climate change etc growing issues in South Asia should be combined with our work, as the first group that would be discriminated against by climate change would likely to be the minorities. SAARC should be working on these issues and the Network should support this. It is stressed that Economic, environmental and minority issues are all intertwined.
- k. Cooperation of national human rights commissions is a model of best practice in Europe and this can be developed in South Asia as well. These European best practices can be learning point.
- l. Building training centers and EU info points would be positive a development since there is potential to elaborate this idea and offering concrete, expertise training.

- m. Institutions develop in a historical context. It is questionable whether European mechanisms can be applied mechanically to South Asia. So one has to re-examine to what extent these European examples can be effectively applied to the South Asian context.
- n. Minority rights should be placed within broader context of human rights in any trans-regional platform. This however might counter some resistance from states.
- o. The project emphasizes government participation since governmental involvement in platforms enhances impact and access. Co-opting such actors to the international platform should be an important strategy of continuing work. Platform in which governments have no participation will take a long time to develop.
- p. The dimension of gender was not developed in the project and should be seriously considered. Tensions between groups of minority women in Europe and Asia over European conception of gender issues are already worked out in EU, but this is not the case for South Asia.
- q. There was a suggestion to address issues of greater visibility and impact by re-orienting focus of study visits towards issues at the centre of public debates, issues that require engagement with the policy makers. It was felt that Equal Opportunities Bill in development of India was an important issue that was missed out but could have been addressed through study visits, topics for publications, workshops and conferences. Also policy papers on issues such as reservation schemes, federalism etc have not been made.
- r. Synergy must be developed between research, civil society and political institutions so that good ideas can turn into a reality.
- s. It was noted that CRG is planning to apply to Union Of Social Sciences for funds to hold fourth conference of network in South Asia with CRG as the leading partner.