



Diplomacy on Track 2: The Role of CSOs, NGOs and Think Tanks

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Panelists:

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Konstantinos Foutzopoulos, Executive Director, South East Leadership Dialogue, Greece

Matej Gregorec, Programme Manager, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Slovenia

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About: The expansion of the global civil society since the end of the Cold War has led to the proliferation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and Think Tanks, which are fast emerging as important non-state actors in a globalised world. Engaged in a wide variety of humanitarian, medical, educational, and other relief and development activities, these organisations also play important roles in managing and resolving different global conflicts. A small but growing number of Track II groups are helping to open the way for a more formal internal or international peace processes. How can the global civil society play an active role in maintaining peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific theatre?

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Good morning, we'll have the first round of discussion for 3 minutes each speaker will be speaking. And then we will sort of have one question for all this panelists. Then we'll have a 10 minute question answer for the group from the team to ask our distinguished panelist. The plenary session is on “diplomacy on track 2: the role of CSOs, NGOs and think tank across borders. Before we sort of go to each of the panelist as a moderator let me sort of say a few words. Then we will have a specific question for the panelist and then we'll of course have a general question for all. As we have seen that for centuries the Bay of Bengal has a function as interconnected and interdependent region, where trade and migration across the borders have fostered cultural diversity with the literal state and the cities. In more recent times it's noticeable that the shift in global geopolitics has transpired as the focus has from the Atlantic to the indo-pacific. We can link the bay of Bengal's region geopolitical sort of importance. There also been sort of established like this part of the region is around 22% of the whole world's population with half of them living in the poverty and facing food and energy crisis, climate vulnerability, the

security and other that we see also the inequality and the rising especially during the covid-19 that we have seen across the globe. This is the onset let's sort of start with our panelist. And as you seen definitely you have that paper in front of you talk about our some of the panelist background. But let me sort of also introduce the panelist I will go for Vlada first, she is the partner alumni international strategist from Ukraine, she also has a years of experience looking into the political strategic different as a political analyst as well. For Vlada sort of let me sort of give you a little bit of an understanding like you know- where we want to sort of see you and focus in some of the areas? While we sort of ask for your valuable comments- how can you see that global civil society actually contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the pacific theater? Particularly in the light of the increasing involvement of track 2 groups in paving the way for more formal intern and international peace process. And you can also bring your examples as well if you might. And you have three minutes for the first session as well, thank you over to you.”

Vlada Galan, “Thank you for the question. It's a pleasure to be here and thank you to the organizers for putting together such an exciting and wonderful conference. First of all, I think we can look at some kind of look at the bigger scope of the successes that we've seen when it comes to track 2 diplomacy in the region. And I would cite here perhaps Taiwan and China. Taiwan is a great example that is it's Taiwan is still plagued consistently by issues of isolation and its status is still in flux. It's isolated from multilateral institutions such as the UN, the WHO and the Civil Aviation organization. A great example of this can be seen during COVID-19 when it comes to Taiwan was really quite excluded. I mean imagine during such a crisis to be excluded from the World Health Organization. Taiwan track 2 diplomacy at this moment transformed into like a vital dynamic form of international engagement for Taiwan. And what they did with this I think is fascinating and can really go to show in the region how this can play such a pivotal role. Taiwan

launched the new South bound policy which is centered around promoting Taiwan's relations with 18 different countries. And one example of this can be seen in a three-year partnership and how this was successful between the Taiwan- Asia exchange foundation and India's observer research foundation, which many of us are very familiar with. They held a Taiwan India dialogue, I believe it was October of last year. It was hosted by the two foundations which just led to some incredible things. You've seen an increased number of Taiwanese and foreign think tanks signing MOUs to engage in collaborative research. But perhaps one of the most profound examples- when it comes to Taiwan is after signing the MOU with the national defense security research last year to promote collaboration on security and defense issues the Czech Republic's European value center for security policy actually opened an office in Taipei. And it was profound because it was the first Czech and second European think tank to do so. You but I think what really brings it all together is not just organizations but coming together in forums like the Yushin forum . That was hosted by the Taiwan agent exchange foundation. But we can look further we can look at you know issues that deal with China, China has been a big one in the region and of significant importance. Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative there's been a lot of rising tensions when it comes to China's territorial claims and its artificial islands in the South China Sea. The security dynamic in the region has significantly shifted. India has its own concerns that come to China, India has expressed those concerns repeatedly in its increased presence. And so looking at some of those issues this is where track 2 diplomacy plays such a big role and organizations and foreign and the coming together of policy makers through such forums can lead to profound changes in what we see moving forward. And I think as I mentioned in the beginning Taiwan is kind of the strongest example of that but it really shows the progress that can be made.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “I think your spot on time. I think that's very good example that you sort of stated about Taiwan. And also sort of talking about I think the platform when you talk about track 2 diplomacy when you know where we have seen that over the years socially politically and economic franchise community is coming together and working and using this platform to raise their voices as well. And you have rightly sort of mentioned about the security dynamics that had been shifted and shifting as well. And exactly the next question would be to our next panelist Matej Gregorec, sorry if I don't pronounce your name properly. He's the program manager, minister of foreign affairs European affairs Slovenia, he has a lot of experiences looking into the global diplomacy lab, and also he worked for the presidency office on the Slovenia as well. For you I think that there's a specific question as we have talked about as Vlada has mentioned about some of the challenges and some of the shift that she's talking about on looking into the track two diplomacy. And I think that's specific question for you if you sort of look into the some of the challenges that track two groups face when operating in the Pacific region especially when we talk about security and other sort of emerging issues that we see on the on the health as well and what would be sort of looking into the mechanism can be employed to facilitate the regional collaboration among the CSOs especially in this Indo-pacific region? Thank you.”

Matej Gregorec, “Thank you very much, so basically one of the biggest challenges of in the region is the changing landscape of the relationship between the actors themselves. So what we're seeing is that the Indo-Pacific is entering another period of acute uncertainty as a transition from the unipolar order of the post-cold war era to increasingly multi-polar worlds. And one of increasing strategic competition in this world we see that national interests count more than the common good and the power politics ultimately prevail when discussing matters. Therefore, mechanisms such as the Council for security cooperation in the Asia pacific and for example

ASEAN to shield the region from the impact of structural pressures need to be reestablished or established a new. And in this new era of international politics marked by increasing rivalries of major powers amidst global security uncertainties which we've seen in the past years which were COVID-19, the financial crisis that stemmed out of it, the role of non-government organizations, civil society organizations and the think tanks is very essential to make sense of the challenging situation that we're facing. And by saying this track 2 diplomacy is by no means to be seen as a substitute for track one but it should rather be seen as a complimentary platform based on the idea that taught leaders outside of official governments can advance strategic national interests and find common ground in ways that their governments cannot the process is also considering diverse stakeholders which work to fill in the gaps of the larger efforts and therefore address power asymmetry among participants in the region and the various actors involved, thank you very much.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you, I think that one what you sort of talked about you know it's not in a substitute to track one is more of a complimentary in nature and how he sort of you talked about ASEAN and the framework that exist in this region as well going forward when we talk about the in the pacific sort of the dynamics. In relation to that we also sort of heard lot of experiences as you all sitting and you have all come with a different sort of experiences in those sort of diplomacy as well as a political analyst and also working in a different sort of forum. My next question to Konstantinos Foutzopoulos, sorry if I again misspelled and your name, the executive director Southeast leadership dialog in Greece, so for you I think that one of the question that we would sort of like to hear from you about some of the examples that we have to heard, so in general, what you think on the track too and some of the examples that you have sort of come

across and if you can sort of also sort of look into that some of the shift that we are talking about as we have heard from two of our panelists, over to you thank you.”

Konstantinos Foutzopoulos, “Thank you very much and thank you also for the invitation to be here today. I would like to start by quoting Peter Jones, a professor in the university of otava, who is also a specialist in track 2 whose sum-ups, track two as follows through much mystery surround it track 2 is in reality a simply method of bringing together influential people from different sides of a given conflict on an unofficial basis to talk about the issues and to jointly develop new ideas about how that conflict may be better managed or resolved. Taking this into account I think we will find a lot of similarities in conflicts not only in the Indo-Pacific in the eastern Mediterranean, in the Balkans, in Latin America in several parts of the world. And from my experience working with track two diplomacy between Greece and Turkey for you that for anyone who's not maybe aware of it in 1996 Greece and Turkey were closed war and after that in both sides of the region there was a common understanding. When the political elites were not ready for it there was a common understanding that we should find some common ground to work on our problems and taking that into account we started doing a lot of track two work between civil society organizations, NGOs, the local authorities and municipalities. So some experience I would like to share is that you know native language speakers are essential to mediation and that comes to the Indo-Pacific region as well. In many cases in track two in track one 1.5 mediation comes from abroad from big powers from other actors, but we should not forget that usually we have people who share the same cultural experiences main usually also the same languages and they're it's much easier for them to work on the ground and find common some common ground. From many surveys we have seen that in conflicts people that are in conflict do not actually see each other as enemies. Second point is that track two builds and maintains relationship over time. The

relationship that you can develop between in an unofficial basis in an unofficial meeting with people that feel much more relaxed with aloof experts let's say or retired ambassadors between academics and civil society organizations, representatives they are there to stay. When there is a when there is a crisis there will be the people that you will call even if the political leaders are not in a position to do so. To sum up in the case of Greece and Turkey we focused on three points- keep the political dialogue on. Focus on confidence-building measures and last but not least find a positive agenda. In the case of the Indo-Pacific as in many other cases we try to find them in any kind of conflict, we try to lose to find the solution for the big picture for the big problem. We usually forget the on ground problems, it's much easier to work on local authorities, to work on with grassroots movements, to work with people on the ground and find common solutions. It is possible it will not solve our problems but it will be a good point to start from. Thank you”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “All the panelists is much more better than me to track the time as well. So I think that thank you very much to be on in time as well. I think that gives the leeway for the next sort of panelist to talk about, because you talk about you know track to diplomacy and how sort of looking into the more inclusive, bringing more the mediation, talking about people's views which is also important to be on grounded what is really happening and what are the issues that we should be looked into. I think that gives the next panelist Jovan Ratkovic, he is a senior fellow Agora strategy group Germany, has been working in this sector and being of course as a analyst been working and sort of looking into the different foreign policy over the years. For Jovan I think that one of the thing that we talked about in different sort of discussion that came up is whole issue of when you talk about mechanism is also got talk about democracy and the institution itself. So for you- do you think that you know or how you see the civil society in and supporting the and in providing knowledge and it is to inform dialogue and negotiation to build this democratic

institution? And if you sort of see and how this trative diplomacy can lead towards that and what are the mechanism or what are the examples do you want to sort of share with us as well from that perspective? Thanks so much.”

Jovan Ratkovic, “Thank you very much, well if we are talking about- how civil society can help this part of the world becoming more democratic? We do not have to look further than this room today. What center for government studies is doing is precisely how civil society can support badly needed political dialogue not only within great nation of Bangladesh but also within Indo-Pacific region. And political dialogue is definitely badly needed and very often it is missing. So it is great that we are all gathered here today. Not all countries of the region are of course at the same level of democratic development and it is always most difficult for civil society to work in the countries that are less democratic or even autocratic. For that you need a lot of courage to do it. There are often many examples of intimidation of those civil society organizations. You know autocratic regimes are never very happy with having them performing their civil role. It is also very difficult for independent media to do their job in societies that are autocratic. Then of course you need funding for your work, funding is not normally coming from the Western world and different governments and organizations from Western world. Then very often civil society actors are being accused of working against national interest of their countries because they are receiving those funds from outside actors. So it is very important also to keep the independence of civil society organizations and even if you receive funding from those Western entities it is important to keep the independence of your decision making and of your actions. This is also very important. And as I mentioned in this very room last year democracy and democratic change has to come from within, it cannot simply be forced from outside. So society has to be ready has to be mature for democratic changes and has to believe that this is possible. And civil society can play very

important role in that. Some of the concrete things that of course civil society organizations can do, they can of course support strengthening of rule of law and democratic institutions fight against corruption that of course in this part of the world is not unknown factor. Freedom of media, that I already mentioned free and fair elections and participation in those elections is also extremely important part of democracy and how civil society can help it. Thanks a lot.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you Jovan, i think that you touched very important point when you talk about democracy and I know democratization and the role of civil society especially having an independent sort of understanding and views as well. And also the you talk about the role of the state in that process and also the rule of law the fight against corruption, freedom of media freedom fair elections, so these are the sort of commonality that we see in the region. I think that also setting the tone like you know if you want to sort of go beyond the democracy and the politics we talk about. Other things that we see in the region especially in the Pacific and especially in this way of Bengal that what is emerging is also the economic diversity, we are talking about equity, we talking about wealth, we are talking about the diversification of different economic interventions as well. And I for that particular sort of question that I have for our next panelist- let me introduce him as well- Debapriya Bhattacharya, he's a distinguished fellow Center for Policy Dialogue in Bangladesh and he's also a member of United Nations Committee for development policy and he was engaging in different diplomacy especially in track 2 and over the years track 1.5 as well. So he comes with a lot of experience on that from that perspective as well. Dr. Debapriya for you I think that you know as your expertise is of course varied but I also want to take that opportunity to hear from you what are the challenges that you know that the government approval different south Asia and there's a different trade negotiation, creating free trade agreement, similar different combined agreements that we see different part of the region as well.

So do you think that this type of track to diplomacy the more informal type of track to diplomacy that we see can feel the void where the states is not been able to sort of come together and look into those trade? Yes you want to go there? Sure thank you.”

Debapriya Bhattacharya, “Thank you chair, for recognizing me. Good afternoon. Let me start start by congratulating CGS for doing this fantastic event once again. I think they deserve a lot of applause and appreciation for making it happen notwithstanding all the challenges they have facing. So I join all of you by with your presence in applauding CGS and their community and the warm hospitality which they have extended to us today. And I will be failing in my duty if I do not welcome the visitors, I see my good friends from various continents over here who are present here and had been contributing their good thoughts and ideas who are distinguished in their own rights and thank you very much for visiting our city with this high monsoon which has come very unpredictably in this country. And you have brought in the rains and rains means good harvest rains means good things coming and on that and that's what the Africans say so thank you very much for being here today, very happy to see you Ali. I have told Madame Chair Sheila that you may ask any question I will give the same answer. You know that that is how I structured in many ways and I have requested her that as my colleagues are going to speak twice they will come in another round with their another four minutes. I asked that as a Bengali I have great difficulty in managing my thoughts in four minutes, I need bit more time so I will punch my two interventions together and make one intervention over here. My first and foremost point is that which CSOs, which civil society we are talking about. See civil society being outside the government, outside the politics, outside the business- is definitely in a democratic environment is more than one civil society we'll have to recognize that and we will have to recognize that much more as we move forward in this what you call post G20 era or post covid era and in this particular historical juncture.

So my point is which CSOs role are we talking about, those CSOs I understand is that which really believes in universal human rights, those who believe in democratic accountability particularly in the oversight institutions and those who believe rule of law in the international relation, at least the three of them there may be much more. So if we are talking about those CSOs and you represent them and I humbly try to be part of that then this CSOs my today's intervention is that is under threat is retreating. If you go back one year back over standing over here I would say that in the last 12 months the CSOs across the region particularly in the bay of Bengal region but obvious i will include Europe us and Latin America and Africa the civil society which we are talking about the liberal democratic space wishing civil society is under retreat. And that's why the demand for their role in building peace stability harmony or for that matter development and connections including trade when it was needed most they are possibly least prepared at this moment. Prepared not for their own reason but for many other reasons. Let me come to that. The current situation in the globe as we see particularly in the post covid situation where we are also seeing that, highly tense geostrategic relationships shaping the economic partnerships. Because we don't know where we are going to supply our chips from, given the relationship with do know how our maritime transportation system and the supply chain will work. On those cases we obviously getting constrained in terms of doing our trade business investment and flow of finance. That is a situation within which possibly the civil society could have played a role. But are they being allowed to? Are they being really making that effort to get those spaces or to use the opportunities? The post covid or the covid situation showed us that the civil society even in the absence of vaccines or in the absence of PPE the personal protection equipments, did play a role in international relationship not only through their campaigns but also their contributions. But the issue is in the post covid situation when the civil society in the cross border relationship including trade investment and

finance is supposed to play a much more larger role we find that space being constrict constrained as we move forward. The issue is also we see that the new rise of the innovation technologies whether it is the Artificial Intelligence or others, where the investment which happens in the private and the corporate sector the intellectual property right protected sector, whether how do you really bring them down to or to have a diffusion of much more of this public goods in the form of public goods in the future. So there is where the transborder civil society role could have been much more important and we could have played that role. I regret to say that's opportunity is also very constrained at this moment. The issue is also that within the countries where we are talking about the in the recent past particularly the decade notwithstanding the covid notwithstanding the very you know very depressed outlook of the macroeconomic situation and the global trade investment situation, nonetheless the countries have progressed. The issue is did the all the citizens really share the outputs of the development. Are there not only left behind people but there are also pushed behind peoples nowadays as we all see over there. So the question is that civil society was supposed to uphold the interests of those pushed behind and the left behind people. Are they being able to do that I contend not very much the issue is that the new youth who are coming to into the center stage, who are more than one-third of the population of most of these countries if not 40%. And they at this moment remains in a very hostage situation and figures show the educated youth are much more underemployed or unemployed than the uneducated youth. And that makes the issue that when this trade investment and finance was supposed to link them to the labor market and to the capital market and give them gainful opportunities. The civil society is supposed to uphold those issues and come together and do that. Are we being able to do that? I regret that not very much over there. Now the question is that why is this happening? Why is this happening? I think the major issue which you will see that most of the countries in the region has seen the rise

of authoritarianism in their respective countries. And many of them are with dubious political legitimacy or political led electoral legitimacy. The more the dark of electoral legitimacy the more the space for the civil society get squeezed, that is what we see. And not only because and we see the regulatory barriers for the civil society to play a role becomes much more challenging as we move. You see I am in this business for quite some time, I am 120 years old and have seen quite a lot in my life by now. I mean I feel I am 120 years old that way. And I have seen how there was a time in the 1980s or '90s we used to talk about track two and then from there in the 1990- 2000- 2010 and onward and in the era of SDGs we moved to track 1.5. But today I find it has come a full circle and we are talking about in tract two. So my general point to you is all that the civil society is at this moment is much less prepared to play the role which we are asking from them. They're having not only financial or resource challenges they're meeting with a much more constrained regulatory framework and as a result they're losing their image in front of their citizens own citizens in many way. I think this is a time to rejuvenate the civil society across the platform to play the role which they are supposed to play and which will benefit the countries of all the in the region and particularly I would think that we could really set up a platform and I will tell this to Zillur and colleagues that to create a platform of the civil society for exchange of information, for having bonding and solidarity and also look for new ways of solving the problems which we are facing. Otherwise we all get to lose together I think this conference will show us some light on that path. Thank you very much for listening to me.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you Dr Debapriya, I think that the next round question was more for all the panelists to talk about the recommendation and some of the suggestion that they would propose to this forum. And how the this whole enhance the contribution of stakeholders and track 2 diplomacy. And the tackling the worldwide and local challenges that we talking about that Dr

Deo just talked about having those regulatory barriers that talk about some of the talk about the innovation and technologies the space of the civil society and I think that the recommendation he put forward to re rejuvenite the civil society across the platform and set up a platform is there something that we would sort of as a put as a recommendation from the panel that sure the organizer here would be sort of taking that as an recommendation to go forward with that that as well. So starting from where Dr Debapriya left and I think I'll pick up from there I'll ask each panelist to come and talk about some of the recommendation very specific- how the civil society on the track to diplomacy could take that into the next level? And how those mechanism could be much more stronger in this region in the whole in the Pacific tilt as well? So I'll start with Jovan with you, then we will go forward. Thank you. So we'll have minimum one to one and a half a minute then we will go with the audience and take some of the questions, thanks.”

Jovan Ratkovic, “Thank you, well very briefly of course the main role of civil society is definitely to try to control and limit the power of the state. To basically raise awareness about any sort of abuses of power of state officials to expose any sort of corruption cases in the society and of course to lobby for good laws when it comes to the governance and anti-corruption. Very often however we do have good laws but they are not being implemented. So implementation of those laws is also extremely important then political participation in each and every country of the region it is important to encourage people especially young people to participate in the elections, both to put the themselves for state positions but first of all to vote at those elections. Of course elections need to be free and fair so civil society has very important role in monitoring those elections. And then of course part of the name civil in civil society term is about fostering tolerance about respecting the other people's opinion. And this is also something that should be promoted by civil society, thank you. And then when it comes to the issue of regional and international cooperation civil

society has a great role there also to support their countries but also to basically suggest some new ideas there is for example in the Pacific Civil Society Forum so civil society organizations need to work together to maximize their impact and they also can do a lot in mediate and try to help resolving a lot of conflicts both within societies of the region but also between some countries of the region. Thank you.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you so much, I think that we again got some of those which I will summarize at the end of the conversation as well. Vlada over to you.”

Vlada Galan, “Best you know the best track 2 diplomacy and i started to talk about this at the end of my last intervention is not done solely by NGOs or civil society but rather by the convergence of NGOs, civil society and lawmakers at forums. Such as the forum, the conference the raisina dialogue in India and even forums such as this one. It's that kind of convergence that is able to bring together these groups in a really meaningful way where real policy change can be made. But I would I would actually air a note of caution here it's very important that NGOs don't become necessarily activists when it comes to of these things. Simply because of the fact that I think this raises a lot of issues with local governments. You're not necessarily the watchdog but instead you can play a much more vital role in bringing people together because I think that blocks from wanting to listen to the solutions that are brought to the table. And instead it's more important if we're talking about a meaningful way where real policy changes can be made coming out of these conferences instead to come together to discuss guys in a proactive way. This doesn't mean being completely silent on issues that are very important but I would kind of reign that as a word of caution for the NGOs. And I would leave it with an example which I love personally the most on where something really meaningful can come out of these things and that's the it's the Herzliya conference which was established in the year 2000 it's kind of like a closed door annual gathering

of kind of the elite when it comes to national security in Israel. This is where Ariel Chiron announced his support for the road map for peace. And it led to the complete withdrawal of Israeli presence in Gaza. He presented for the first time a unilateral disengagement plan and even the white house commented on it which was kind of groundbreaking. So I would leave that as an example of worthings can go.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you, I think that what you suggested about the bit of a notion a note on the caution on the NGOs and the whole issue on the activist and activism I think that's also very important when we sort of looking into the diplomacy as well. Let's move to our next panelist Konstantinos Foutzopoulos. Can I sort of ask you to say something.”

Konstantinos Foutzopoulos, “Yes, thank you. See you mentioned something very important technology and technology is something that we forget. We live in a digital age and a practical recommendation would be that civil society has the power to utilize technology for peace and democracy. Exactly because we're in the digital age and technology is a very powerful tool for peace building. Civil society organizations can leverage social media platforms online forums and promote peace messages, messages of democracy, success stories encourage collaboration. These tools of course can be used in an known very effective way. But I think it's much easier than 10-20-30 years before for the civil society to build trust to work around the anxieties of the local populations and build also understanding and a common and find a common ground. Another thing would be to support grassroot initiatives. We should not forget where everything started and even at a political level but also at the civil society level it's very important to go back to the grassroots to go back to the local communities to talk to the people. And there we can build initiatives that can have a deep understanding of the local context and can propose more effective more culturally sensitive solutions for dispute. So I think that these interactions can lead to solutions that could

build the foundation for more formal negotiations. But technology is definitely a key for or anything that we will do in the future. Thank you.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you and last I think Matej Gregorec, if you sort of say a few words.”

Matej Gregorec, “Yes, thank you very much. I mean I wish to second the many things that my fellow panelists already stated, one of the most important ones out of these is that including civil society in solutions for challenges is essential where whether we want to achieve lasting and sustainable solutions. And there is such a wide array of topics outside of those really contentious issues such as migrations, ecology, business, drug trafficking, sustainable development etc that can be discussed alongside. And track two diplomacy should mainly be seen as a confidence-building instrument aimed towards creating or aiding an environment of trust and putting pressure on political elites to try to reach some sort of a solution. And a mechanism whereby influential opinion makers can establish broad societal consensus and reflect those in reality by pushing political elites. And maybe just one most important recommendation regarding the track to diplomacy is that the track to diplomacy and processes and other similar exercises which are being used. The ideas discussed there sometimes never take track what is important however is that the transfer of those ideas into people's minds who will take them home and might consider them at some point is essential. Yeah, thank you very much.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you, very quickly. Let me summarize some of the important sort of recommendations suggestions that came from the panelist then we'll go to the audience to take some questions and any sort of areas that you have for the panelist. So very quickly I think that some of the thing that came out very important part of this discussion is that of course as Dr. Debapriyo started to look into the regional civil society platform and create in this region to have those dialogues I think that's very important that issue. Similarly I think that one of the thing that

one of our also panelist talked about is that the civil society forum, the maximization of this of society to comes together and fostering the tolerance. I think that's very important I think when you talk about this whole region I think that fostering tolerance is one of the thing even from the un as well this is something that we are also looking into very seriously as well. So I think that's very important when you talk about when the lobbying and how the states sort of act on that as well is also very important that's also another recommendation that another recommendation that also talked about is and of course we heard some examples. But also sort of cautionary note to the NGOs when you sort of deal with the sort of diplomat and what needs to be done. Then we also heard from our one of our panelists on the technology for peace and democracy I think that's also very important when we talk about peace building process we heard from the panelists as well. When attractive diplomacy the mediation that has been done. We have seen lot of successful mediation over the over the years as well under this track two both internal and when we come to the cross boundary and transboundary nature this sort of regional sort of conflict that we are seeing. I think that's also very important the other thing. That also talked about is looking into the local context the solution hearing people I think that's very important when you talk about tractive diplomacy I think this is the exact forum when we bring the defranchise population to raise their voices to talk about this issue as well. But before that we as a civil society groups and also the state needs to know what is the what is the crust of the issues that you know and understand the solution which is very important to do the formal negotiation. And I think that another one also came very importantly is the trust issue that also comes when you talk about the confidence building under the track 2 diplomacy as well. So I think these are the few recommendation put forward by our panelist. And let's sort of go back to the audience. As well now I will ask it we have around 10 minutes. Yes I'll come, we have 10 minutes. So don't know how I do the justice in doing this I

think that's the part of the moderator which where I cannot make everybody happy. Yes I will come so I think that first let's be very specific about the question or suggestions that you have. I'll will ask the organizer to hand over the mics. And if you have any specific question to our distinguished panelist or if it's a general please state that but very succinct your question so we have around this 1:10 so we have around 1:20 then we'll wrap up in by 1:30. So we have 10 minutes to sort of hear some of the questions then we go back to the panelist. Yes madam, thank you madam with the name and bit of the institution for our panel.”

Question one, “Thank you madam moderator, I am professor Dilara Chowdhury, retired professor of political science I used to teach at Jahangirnagar university. First of all my thanks sincere thanks to the panelist for highlighting the role of the civil society in the democratization of a nation democracy as well as to sustain it. You have very brightly pointed out the important role the civil society plays. And we in Bangladesh discussed about it when Bangladesh transited from Ershad’s authoritarian and rule to national democracy. But sadly there were very vibrant discussion blooming of democratic civil societies in that era in '90s. But sadly after all these years through the political development and political process of Bangladesh we have come to a sad state of civil society as pointed out by Dr. Debapriyo. Now having said that my question is to Dr. Debapriya - he has mentioned that we should rejuvenate civil society my question is how? Because without the state creating the autonomous space autonomous space for the citizens the civil society really cannot become. Thank you if Dr. Debapriya would really tell us how we can rejuvenate civil society in a country but there are no there is a very political space for human rights absence of rule of law.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you, thank you so much. Sure that we will come to a panelist let's take two or three questions together then yes then we'll go there. Yes what is happening civil society.”

Question 2, “Thank you ma'am for giving me the opportunity to ask you a question, to introduce myself it's a peculiar introduction. I've been a soldier for 28 years tried to be a member of the civil society for 11 years and now a political worker for 16 years. I don't have a very big question but I have a submission and an appeal you know the english phrase called endangered species. In societies like ours at developing country especially Bangladesh the space for civil society is getting reduced day by day. Who on earth is going to save the civil society? And if they are not saved how will the rest of population be saved? The danger comes from political autocratism political dictatorship. Now is there any possibility of civil societies of similar countries cooperating with each other to promote this liberalism to promote this freedom so that they can together fight it out for the sake of the greater people. To introduce myself I major general Ibrahim retired soldier a freedom fighter of 1971 and now chairman Bangladesh Kallyan Party, thank you for giving me the floor and listening to my suggestion.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you, yes. So Dr Riaz is being there for a while so can we take take his question first then come to you okay yeah so you're both talking at the so I think the choice could be between you two.”

Question 3, “Let me ask first professor okay thank you and I am also a former general and a diplomat and like my predecessor General Ibrahim also heading a political party in Bangladesh a new one this party is called Noitik Somaj. Moral purposes as talked about problems how to bring about moral values and ethics into the political process. That is what Noitik Somaj is about now my comment I fully agree with the commentators so far including Dr. Debopriyo, i just less than

one minute we know about the situation in developing world. Now civil society can only function effectively if there's a strong political society, meaning a developed political parties. A country where parties are weak authoritarianism will grow and now last point one comment we talk about civil society but I think in peace building peace making there is a role of the military society as well. Nobody talks about it we already have half a dozen military people here thank I think we have a role to play and I'll call upon the military people to think about organizing a military society not only nationally but also globally thank you.”

Question 4, “My questions are twofold here first of all given the circumstances are we expecting too much from CSOs, the civil society organization. And should there be a distinction and historical context to it? While we're talking about civil society organization and let me give you very clear example. If we are talking about a civil society organization in Germany and visa if we are talking about in India in Bangladesh where the legitimacy of which to borrow Dr. Debopriyo termed the legitimacy the moral and electoral legitimacy is questionable can they play the same role as a matter of fact? That's why my comment these are my two questions basically - can we just simply discuss a historically and lack of context in understanding civil society? And whether we are expecting too much and devoid of these political circumstances, where the civil society has been viated by the authoritarian regime? Thanks to Mr. Modi in case of India, thanks to Hasina in case of Bangladesh, thanks to others for example Mr Erdogan in case of turkey. Civil society have been decimated because that is the pathway for autocratization so having the conversation of this track to vis-e-versa in the CSO- are we losing the fact? Are we losing sight of the fact that CSO cannot be considered without the history without the context without the system of governance without the moral and legal and constitutional legitimacy of the state and particularly the government.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “I think that we have one more question to go then we'll come back to our panelist”

Question 5, “I am Amin Karim a retired former professor of university of Malaya Kualalampur, you talk very nicely about Taiwan sorry, China and South China and so on and so forth. My question is very specific- can your track 2 diplomacy impact the interdependency theory that exists between China and America or you can bring India as well? If you want to and then the question of you know that- semiconductor issue, that is disturbing the situation between China, Taiwan and America. It has the potential of and then the trade war between America and China- can the track 2 diplomat help there assist in diffusing the tension between these three countries? Thank you.”

Question- 6, “Okay thank you. My name is Samir from India. Anyone in the panel can answer my question. This is related to attractive track 2 diplomacy, i mean some of the panelists claim that track 2 has been a very vital has played a vital role in in conflict resolution. But when we see some of the examples like India-Pakistan, we see recent developments in Ukraine and russia and we also see our Palestine issue, why it has been unable to address these critical and international disputes? I mean - are we trying to misrepresent the track to the way some of the panelists have done? Thank you.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you. I think that we can come back to panelist there particular question that has been sort of asked to one of our panelist Dr. Debapriyo. So we'll start with him but I think there other sort of question which is quite generic and I'll let our panelist to choose who wants to talk about it. Especially when you talk about the civil society space the construction I think there's a dichotomy like you know you're talking about tract 2 diplomacy where there is a restriction of civil society to talk about their own sort of views as well. So I think that's very important when you see the contradiction that is happening I think that would be any panel would

panelist could take that. And we also sort of talked about on this whole US China's sort of track to diplomacy the dispute that we also hearing from the region as well how this trative diplomacy can sort of really address those or not? So I'll start with Dr. Debopriyo with this very specific question to him. Then I'll open the floor for other panelists as well thanks.”

Debapriya Bhattacharya, “Thank you very much madame chair. I'll be try to be very brief on these issues. I just wanted to respond to my two generals who have become political leaders now, so they have mentioned about the strength of the civil society is strengthened further through a strong political society. Our experience is that when that political society is on the street fighting for democracy they find the civil society as their friends. When that political society goes to power they define those political civil society as their enemies or adversaries. So I think there is something to be learned by the political society that they never remain in power for all time to come. They have to come down to the street one day or another and then they will have to find new friendship with the civil society, that's my one point to you sir. The on the other point I think what if you look at the history, it because of the rise of authoritarianism in many countries what is becoming with one part of the civil society they are also taking becoming nationalist civil society. I can name names countries where they in the inter intercountry relationship they uphold more the country the so-called national perspective given by an authoritarian regime instead of coming back on the values as falling back on the values and which shared across the boarder. This has also become a major problem for the civil society to play their roles in many ways. Colleagues I think today it was track two but essentially we spoke about civil society because track two also includes the private sector and also the communities along with that. My last point taking on from Prof. Alia's- context matters. Definitely context matters it matters how the level of institutions are there, how the regulat framework and implemented, how the judiciary and the other oversight functions

are really implemented, you know not being partisan not being political all these things all matter. So the question is how do you get out of this in the looking into the future? One of my colleagues yesterday night evening one of you was telling me this is the time to lie low- this is the time to lie low don't get over too high you will be cut short in many ways. In that way so the issue is whether it is time for to play active role or to time to be more preserve to preserve your assets and wait for some other time on that. But we may not survive till that time so what do we do at this moment in that way that's a very good question I have a Bengali word to Bengali words for that particularly for the media that this is the time to not so much to do promotion but to do preservation. Does it mean we don't do anything? No, at least at least we do three things my first and foremost my colleagues have suggested go back to the people, go downstream, you if you don't want to be high, you go downstream talk to the people talk to the organization talk to your constituency this is number one. Number two technology has opened up new opportunities the social media and many others opportunities are there artificial intelligence has given empowered us as well we should know how to use the technology and we use it in the future. And the third and that's why I here today to build the solidarity across the board with all the colleagues who are all around and who are more possibly more experienced than us in many other ways. So build solidarity build partnership build friendship and that's what we'll make a stick and come and face the future. Thank you very.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you much, I think he made the moderator role very easy to summarize I think that's very good thank you so much Dr. Debopriyo. So can I sort of move to our other colleagues sort of talk about very shortly any of the issues that you want to talk about. Any anyone, that you want to sort of raise in general because there was a bit of as a question as well as- how do you see the constraint of the civil society where you talk about autog as well so how do

you sort of see that when you talk about track 2 diplomacy? Or we can wrap it up so very quickly about the question.”

Konstantinos Foutzopoulos, “Do we expect too much from the civil society and from track two? Yes, we do. But we do expect a lot from our politicians, we do expect a lot from all our partners from all our institutions. So if there is a gap to be filled and there is a huge gap to be filled in the indo pacific but not only if there is a possibility to have this kind of informal interactions as you said very well and that would be also my point that's the most important thing we are here today in this room from so many different countries we have the opportunity to talk mostly freely to exchange ideas generate ideas. At the end of the day even if there is not a crisis now it's a kind of way of preventive diplomacy we build the narrative for the future, we build the connections and we build also and the engagement that we will need when and if a crisis occurs, so thank you very much for the invitation thank you very much for the great job and congratulations to the center for governance studies. And for the excellent organization thank you.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Yes any other panelist you want to sort of join, say something, yes please.”

Vlada Galan, “There was a question asked about Taiwan and the us, I believe it was the military the former the General that that asked the question. It's interesting US-Chinese relationship and the difficulties and in breaking the ice there normalizing relations goes back for decades. But one of the most prominent examples and you asked how we solve this issue now with escalating tensions and everything that's happening with China and Taiwan and how the us I think plays a role i think that was the root of the question. I would know that in the 1970s I don't know if anybody remembers this it was referred to as the Pingpong diplomacy. And it was American Chinese table tennis teams that were engaging in matches around 1971 it was an informal sports exchange if you will but it broke the ice between the two nations which ironically ended up paving the way for a

more diplomatic normalization of relations and led to president Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972. And so we saw you know something similar to this take place in the 90s, it wasn't Pingpong tournaments but you had the US-China comprehensive economic dialogue, which started as kind of a track 1.5 effort if you will. And this dealt a lot with intellectual property access to hurdles, in intellectual property also saw a very positive result I won't go fully all the way into it. So I think that there's a lot of room now for track 2 diplomacy as we've seen in past examples when it comes to the US-China relationship and the situation with Taiwan is no different. In the inside of the United States Congress you have congressmen and senators that are very hawkish when it comes to China. They're ringing the alarm bells on China. And this is escalating in the formal sense of the relationship is escalating tensions not necessarily helping them. So it is going to take track 2 to diplomacy effort when it comes to the Taiwan-China relationship as we look for solutions there and how the US can actually deescalate things. And I see that the current temperature inside of the United States Congress and Senate coming from within the republican party and also the democratic party is that those tensions formally are just going to continue escalating further this is exactly where track 2 diplomacy is needed. Thank you”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you i think that Jovan then I can sort of ask me to sort of come at the at the last then we'll wrap up thank you”

Jovan Ratkovic, “Thank you for a great set of questions and comments. Very briefly, yes civil society today is much more powerful than ever before. It is much more influential in decision making processes in many of the countries of the world and also with international organizations. So this is the fact so of course that made us you know that make us expecting even more from civil society. Of course civil society cannot replace the role of the governments, the role of democratic institutions including political parties which are of course very important institutions in democratic

life in any country. And it cannot replace play international organizations but it can help and it can do a lot of things faster in more efficient way in more daring way than those organizations or governments can do. People that are running civil society organizations in countries that are autocratic countries are heroes. They are putting very often their lives online so we should be aware of that and of course we need to care about historical context, about cultural context of each and every of the countries. I was one of the creators of democratic movement in my own country. That grew from 20 people to 100,000 people in two years and we managed to get rid of our autocratic leader at the that time. But you know those kind of things cannot be implemented from outside they have to take care about every local context. It they have to come from within every society and this is what I was I was talking about. But I mean big you know to all the leaders of civil society organizations in in the countries that are autocratic countries and I mean you know good luck to all of them.”

Question 7, “Thank you civil society of x party, civil society of y party, civil society of z party and one civil society talk the truth another civil society say no this is not correct. So what do you think that you are talking about the bondings of the civil society and strengthening civil society much more and you said it is much more stronger than before how does it works then it makes then a total cage and confusion to all the people at large of the country. I don't think that in that case civil society rather making them controversial in any case anyway my name is Dr. Md. Shajahan, secretary general of Bureau of Human Rights Bangladesh and at practicing advocate in supreme court of Bangladesh. Can you tell me?.”

Jovan Ratkovic, “Very quickly of course it is ideal, if civil society is not connected to any particular political party. So civil society should not be part of any political party and people from civil society should not do that job because they want to come to political power. If you want to

come to political power then you go of course through political parties you do not go through civil society organizations. But of course every civil society organization has its own role it is ideal if they can work together and support each other. But you know very often it is not the case. But that does mean that they shouldn't continue individually doing very important job that they are doing thank you. Thank you.”

Debapriya Bhattacharya, “Thank you I think that no I cannot really, the answer is very simple what you're talking about the civil society they're not civil society. They are extension of the political society they are parties and people. So why make this confusion at all so I think it's very clear those who enjoy government benefits government promotions and I said they're part of the state structure. So they're not civil society it's a way of confusing the civil society and breaking it up. Thank you.

Jovan Ratkovic, “As you probably know we even have an expression which is called GONGO governmentally organized non-governmental organizations, you know”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you so much I think that let's wrap up with a last panelist please.”

Matej Gregorc, “Yeah thank you, I just want to add something quickly about there was a question before about building civil societies and whether there's a future for civil societies? Basically I think this region should not be afraid of this because you have very young populations very populous young populations and it is exactly the youth that have the greatest potential in establishing idea movements and making things move forward. They're basically the agents of change and they are the representatives of the act of civil societies.”

Sheela Tasneem Haq, “Thank you I think now we are at the very last moment and I think that we are completing let me sort of very quickly I think that I don't need to summarize. I think that there's

a very distinctive sort of recommendation suggestion different discussion that sort of came from both the panelists and also from the audiences as well. But just to wrap up I think that again the role of the civil society I think it's act up is something that we talked about also listening to the to the real people. I think that's also very important that we talked about trust building is something very important when you talk about the track two or track 1.5 even track one I think the trust building is something that we have to definitely keep working on it. Building solidarity among all the participants here and beyond is something is very important to look into the transboundary nature of the issue. And the I think that whole issue on the global connectivity the role of democratic institution which is very important and the history and the culture of each of the nation state is very important to go any sort of mediation and looking into the any sort of diplomacy that we talk about. So from my end thank you very much to all the panelists to be here. And I think it's a very as we say that we need to juvenile the civil society I think that listening to all of us we are all bit juvenile as well. But the next step is the challenge is how you we take it to the next level. I think this is something that we also talked about how the organizer CGS would take this as a platform and help us to reconnect and keep on the discussion that we all having for the coming 3 days as well. So thank you cgs for organizing this Bay of Bengal last year was also very interesting session that we have been participating and from me as a moderator I am also part of the UNDP and we are very we are very grateful that we are part of the cgs 3 days Bay of Bengal conversation, so thank you very much.”