

International-local Linkages in Multi-stakeholder Partnerships Involved in Reconciliation, Inter-communal Bridge-building and Confidence-building

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the involvement of the international community (international actors) in post-conflict reconstruction in the context of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) operating in the issue-area of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building. In particular, the paper analyses the international-local linkages within the MSPs, and suggests that although the involvement of the international community in post-conflict reconstruction (peace-building) is heavy and indispensable, it is neither straight-forward nor problem-free. In order to understand these linkages in a specific MSP context, a number of factors need to be taken into account and analysed. The paper suggests that at least three levels of analysis are required in order to understand the role of the international community and the international-local linkages in the context of MSPs addressing reconciliation, confidence-building and inter-community bridge-building in a post-conflict context. Firstly, the very complex nature of the international community itself, with many different actors seeking to achieve their own objectives in a very competitive environment; secondly, the very difficult conditions in war-torn societies that are operationally/institutionally unable to begin any peace-building processes on their own; and thirdly, the characteristics (motivations, organisation) of international and domestic actors themselves.

KEY WORDS:

post-conflict reconstruction, international involvement, national actors, multi-stakeholder partnerships, reconciliation

Introduction

The purpose of this article¹ is to bring to attention and provide a preliminary analysis of the role of the so-called international-local linkages within multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) – a new form of global multilateralism or multilateral co-operation “beyond intergovernmental diplomacy” or “traditional nation-state multilateralism” (Martens 2007: 4) – in the issue-area of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building in post-conflict societies. This issue-area of international relations can be broadly understood as “a frame of reference that focuses on the restoration and rebuilding of relationships” because in a post-conflict context, rational approaches to resolving conflict issues tend to be ineffective (Lederach 1997: 24).

Importantly, reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building are long-term, deep and broad processes of relationship-(re)building (Kriesberg 2001, Lederach 2001, McCandles 2001, Bloomfield *et al.* 2003, Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004, Hamber and Kelly 2004). As such, this process is very complex and typically involves a myriad of different actors. A study of peacebuilding has established that states and other actors understand that reconciliation or the process of relationship-(re)building in a post-conflict context is very important (Smith 2004: 42). They are also willing to take part in those efforts. Indeed, for (above all Western) donor countries, reconciliation is one of the four main categories of initiatives that receive substantive donor support, after political and socio-economic development, but before security (*Ibid.*).

However, the presence of myriad actors who are involved in this process also leads to problems. Therefore, in order to avoid duplication of work and to better co-ordinate their activities and supplement each other, various actors interested in the process of relationship-(re)building can participate in this process in the form of an MSP, understood as institutions that “bring together several stakeholders - i.e. actors (private or public) that have a shared interest in the outcome and demonstrate some degree

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of ownership - to address a particular issue", whereby ownership refers to some form of resource investment and to participation in decision-making in the MSP.² In international relations, MSPs, together with other forms of multilateral co-operation beyond the nation-state, such as public policy networks, global partnerships and initiatives, have appeared after the 1992 Rio conference with a view to building a partnership between public and private, governmental and non-governmental actors to jointly address environmental and developmental problems, which should lead to better results than previously when such problems had been typically addressed, at the international level, by intergovernmental institutions and (individual) states (Martens 2007: 7).

With this new approach to global governance, the United Nations (UN) and other actors seek to achieve a number of secondary goals, in addition to managing a particular issue-area of international relations, such as peace-building, which is the focus of this paper. Among these secondary goals, reflected in the very word 'partnership', is the idea that this new form of co-operation will – while enabling partners to follow their own financial, ideological or other interests – also provide for a more legitimate, equitable and participatory (achieved through a more democratic decision-making) way of co-operation in international relations.³ In reality, however, these new forms of multilateral governance at different levels have not managed to overcome some of the 'old' collective-action problems. It is therefore not surprising that Martens (2007: 7) is critical of the very concept of partnership between governmental/state and non-governmental/non-state actors, "because it suggests that participants are working at the same level and share an equal status", which is not the case. The use of the terms 'partnership' and 'partners' is of course not coincidental, as Zammit (2003: 51) points out with respect to development aid.

There has been some debate about the benefits and achievements of this new form of multilateralism in international affairs, and about its obstacles and problems (Zammit 2003, Utting and Zammit 2006, Martens

2 MultiPart (EU-funded 7th Framework Programme: FP7/2007-2013, grant agreement No. 217564): *Final Report of Work Packages 2 and 3: Theoretical & Methodological Framework and Guidance for the Project*, prepared by Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna (Pisa), University of Bradford and European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (Graz), p. 28. Hereinafter referred to as MultiPart: *Theoretical & Methodological Framework*.

3 MultiPart: *Theoretical & Methodological Framework*, p. 43.

2007). What seems to be overlooked in this debate is the nature of the linkages between the international and local/national. This paper seeks to fill in this gap in one issue-area of international relations (i.e. relationship-(re)building in a post-conflict context) where the types of actors, and levels at which they operate, appear particularly sensitive. This is because the very goal of relationship-(re)building involves local/national actors, former adversaries in a manifest conflict, but also because international actors are typically perceived through the conflict lenses – i.e. what their role was during the conflict and who they are (supposedly) siding with. By looking at the nature of this relationship through a detailed analysis of two cases of MSPs in the issue-area under discussion in Kosovo and Afghanistan, the paper seeks to unveil some of the issues that need to be taken into account, and further explored, with respect to this new form of multilateralism in a post-conflict context.

The paper is divided into five substantive parts. After this brief introduction to the MSPs, two case studies are presented in section two, section three addresses the complexity of actors and their interests, which affect the functioning of MSPs, section four analyses a specific post-conflict context in which the two cases of MSPs operated, and section five deals with the internal characteristics of both MSPs. In concluding remarks in section six, I reflect on the findings based on these two case studies as applicable to the role of international actors in governing this issue-area.

The context and actors: the SPARK and the Action Plan

The societal context and case selection

The two selected cases⁴ of MSPs active in the issue-area of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building are partnerships

4 A detailed research report with empirical findings, based on desk research and field work (with a number of in-depth interviews with stateholders and beneficiaries of the MSPs), can be found in: MultiPart [EU-funded 7th Framework Programme: FP7/2007-2013, grant agreement No. 217564]: *Final Report of Work Package 4d: Reconciliation, Inter-communal Bridge-building and Confidence-building*, prepared by the University of Ljubljana, the University of Florence and the University of Bradford, edited by Petra Roter (as the work package co-ordinator). Hereinafter referred to as MultiPart: Report 4d.

that were formed and operated in Kosovo and Afghanistan. The former suffered years of oppression under Serbian nationalist leader Slobodan Milošević, only to be finally engaged in a fully-fledged conflict in 1999 that resulted in close to two million displaced persons, half of which remained in the Balkans for years afterwards (European Union 2013: 2). In this context, after the declaration of independence in February 2008 one of the biggest challenges of peace-building was and continues to be to reassure the return of displaced persons in general, and minority returns in particular. The MSP in Kosovo under examination here is a partnership that dealt with the issue of minority returns, called the Sustainable Partnerships for Assistance to Minority Returns in Kosovo (SPARK). During its existence between 2005 and 2009, SPARK provided “an integrated umbrella mechanism for delivering the full spectrum of multi-sectoral assistance for [sustainable minority] returns”, both for individual and spontaneous, and for organised and group returns.⁵ In reality this meant predominantly the building of new houses for the returnees, help in reconstruction of their houses, building of the infrastructure needed for a successful return, as well as working with the local community to accept the returnees.

Afghanistan, on the other hand, is a fragile state with unstable political institutions unable to deal with ethnic and other divisions that have crippled this country for decades. It was a playing ground for the two adversaries during the Cold War, whose withdrawal left the country with an ongoing societal conflict that ended in a hard-line Taliban rule in 1996. After the 9/11 attacks on the United States of America (USA), and the presence of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, the country was a target of a military intervention in 2001 by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO, which continues its presence in Afghanistan through 2014, in the framework of its International Security Assistance Force – ISAF) and allied forces. The Bonn conference in December 2001 then paved the way for internationally-sponsored and supervised post-conflict reconstruction with several dimensions, including political reconstruction with a new constitution and the first democratic presidential elections in 2004 (with Hamid Karzai as the first democratically elected president in internationally organised elections) (CIA 2014).

In such a highly sensitive environment that is hardly described as a post-

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5 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 280.

conflict society, one of the key challenges in terms of relationship-(re) building is the issue of transitional justice. Accordingly, the MSP under examination in Afghanistan is a nation-wide MSP called the Action Plan on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation: Action Plan of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (the Action Plan), whose goal in the period of its existence between 2005 and 2008 was to promote “truth seeking and documentation; promotion of national unity and reconciliation; and the establishment of mechanisms for accountability.”⁶ The Action Plan thus sought to contribute to acknowledging of the suffering of the Afghan people, ensuring the formation of accountable institutions free of human rights violators and war criminals, helping in truth-seeking efforts and reconciliation and consequently to national unity.⁷

MSP formation and actors (partners) involved

The Action Plan was established following co-ordinated pressure by the international community, working with governmental and non-governmental actors in the field of transitional justice in Afghanistan. It was launched (in December 2006) by the following ‘partners’: the Government of Afghanistan, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), but it had been presented and agreed upon at an international conference in The Hague in June 2005, attended by, among others, Afghan high level officials including ministers), Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the European Union (EU) Special Representative, and representatives of the European Commission, the Governments of Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK) and the USA, and Afghan national experts.⁸ Among international non-governmental partners, the most notable one was the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) that had been active, together with the AIHRC and UNAMA, in promoting accountability for massive human rights violations previously to the formation of the Action Plan. The ICTJ participated in the formulation of the Action Plan as a

6 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 118.

7 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 136.

8 See a report on the Action Plan by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, at: http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Reports/Thematic%20reports/Action_Pln_Gov_Af.pdf (10 July 2014).

technical advisor.⁹

Similarly, the process of minority returns in Kosovo would not have begun without the commitment and help by the international community. Like other MSPs seeking to enable the return process in Kosovo, SPARK could not have been established without international actors for a number of reasons, including the poor economic situation in Kosovo, the lack of funding for housing and house reconstruction, and the non-existing institutions (national and local administration) capable of addressing such a difficult and conflictual issue. It was thus the United Nations (UN) that, in the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999), placed the responsibility for the process of refugee and internally displaced peoples' return within the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which was to be assisted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Kosovo Force (KFOR). SPARK was created according to UNMIK's Manual for Sustainable Return 2005 and to the Strategy on Sustainable Return and Municipal Return Strategies of the Ministry for Communities and Returns (MCR), with the goal of a shared (international and local/national) responsibility for minority return, but with a gradual path towards achieving full responsibility by Kosovo national and local authorities. The leading partner in the formulation of SPARK in 2005 was the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which was helped by UNMIK, UNHCR and the MCR. SPARK was in the beginning heavily owned by international actors, with the participation of the authorities, and the Employment Promotion Agency Kosovo. This international 'domination' was due to the lack of national funding and due to the undeveloped civil society in Kosovo, but the local NGO Developing Together was later involved in SPARK and so were individual members of UNIJA/M – i.e. an umbrella NGO composed of various associations of internally displaced persons¹⁰

The complexity of actors and their interests

Conflicts of interests or values occur not just between governmental actors

9 MultiPart: Report 4d, pp. 93–4.

10 MultiPart: Report 4d, pp. 237–40.

and the civil society or non-governmental actors (Scholte 2002), but they are very much part and parcel within the governmental sector. For MSPs this means that they will typically function in a context of conflicting state interests, as well as of competing or conflicting interests of international governmental institutions. The Action Plan in Afghanistan was significantly affected by such conflicting international views and interests: the emphasis by the US-led coalition on guaranteeing security as the key objective to be achieved with the help of the international community gradually pushed the issue of reconciliation to the second plan. With a gradual deterioration of security, every available resource available was needed to mitigate the problem. This included (former) warlords, the Taliban and others who were co-opted to the Afghan government and governmental institutions, thus further limiting all efforts to address past human rights violations and establish the necessary conditions for renewed inter-communal relations-building. Empirical research has shown that one of the reasons for the failure of the AP was also due to the fact that since the very beginning some external stakeholders in the international community were not genuinely inclined to deny their direct or indirect support to certain individuals – warlords or even war criminals – who played a key role in the Karzai administration and could allegedly guarantee the stabilization of the country and thus the protection of foreign interests.¹¹

Whereas the USA gradually shifted away from transitional justice, the EU still supported the Action Plan, but some stakeholders clearly stated that the EU should have been putting more pressure on the USA for transitional justice.¹²

In addition to many different (also conflicting) interests at play in the complex international community, the diversity of international actors is likely to affect the very functioning of MSPs. At least two issues warrant attention in this respect: relations between the governmental and non-governmental sectors, and relations among international actors themselves (Jaeger 2007). With respect to the latter, it needs to be borne in mind that each actor (also) seeks to promote its own goals and interests, and many states are faced with balancing their individual interests with collective interests of international governmental organisations they are a member of, as well as with collective interests of partners/stakeholders

¹¹ MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 102.

¹² MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 107–8.

they work with in a particular issue-area.

Furthermore, such individual and collective interests of various international actors can be either contrary to the expectations of national/local actors and their needs, or can themselves be mutually competing or even mutually exclusive of one another. Frequently, international actors would thus find themselves competing for managing the same issues on the ground, or for setting the priorities for international action (a typical dilemma observed with respect to Afghanistan was the dilemma between prioritising either security or transitional justice).¹³

With respect to the Action Plan, it has been argued that the process of reconciliation could have been more successful had international donors managed to agree on a clear platform and to avoid their mutual competition in terms of cross-funding groups, which was perceived as having further increased fragmentation. These differences among international (individual and collective) actors and the effects on the functioning of the Action Plan in particular, or on the process of reconciliation in general, could not be complemented by the very weak non-governmental sector.¹⁴

The limited resources tend to lead to competition in the already underfunded non-governmental sector. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) need to shop for projects in order to sustain themselves. This can have very negative effects on the actual beneficiaries and on their involvement on the ground, for they depend on preferences of donors, and not necessarily on the actual needs in post-conflict societies. In the early days of SPARK, there was a certain level of competition among NGOs, international and local, for finances and visibility. This developed into some kind of 'NGO business': NGOs often took the lead in drafting concept papers for projects. Those NGOs then typically also presented such project plans for approval to relevant decision-making bodies at the municipal level. This way, the projects benefitted NGOs and met their interests, rather than the interests of the municipalities, individuals and groups concerned.¹⁵ In the end, this 'business' certainly contributed to

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13 MultiPart: *Report 4d*, pp. 107–8.

14 MultiPart: *Report 4d*, p. 109.

15 MultiPart: *Report 4d*, p. 254.

the fact that such projects were less successful.

Such competition at the international level can lead to several negative side effects at the local level. Firstly, it can increase patronage by foreign donors. This happened with the Action Plan, which gradually became perceived as 'a foreign discourse' – something that needed to be done, essentially to please the donors, rather than to help create the necessarily preconditions for relationship-(re)building in the Afghan society; the price to break the 'internal ruling pacts' seemed too high in the given circumstances of a lukewarm commitment by president Karzai and some other international partners. Secondly, international competition can affect behaviour locally. Local/national actors could play games with the donors in order to gain resources, possibly from several sources at once.¹⁶

All this can of course lead to sub-optimal outcomes. In an MSP context, the involvement of several (similar) actors therefore requires a great amount of co-ordination. When the latter is lacking, as was the case with respect to the UNDP and the UNHCR within SPARK's food assistance component, this can lead to unwanted consequences. As the UNDP and the UNHCR reportedly failed to co-ordinate their activities in the field of food assistance and the delivery of food packages to displaced populations, beneficiaries in some municipalities 'benefitted' from this by obtaining extra food packages.¹⁷ The lack of inter-institutional (inter-stakeholder) co-ordination thus led to the loss of resources and to the unequal distribution of assistance among the beneficiaries, which can further worsen inter-community relations in a post-conflict society.

With respect to relations between the governmental and non-governmental sector within MSPs active in the issue-area under consideration, two trends can be observed. Firstly, the non-governmental sector depends on governments and governmental institutions in terms of financial support for projects and policies to be carried out on the ground. Reconciliation or relationship-(re)building in general cannot be achieved without the governmental support and commitment to this very difficult process at the political and social/societal levels. In Afghanistan, the lukewarm approach by President Karzai, with the tacit support of key

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¹⁶ MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 109.

¹⁷ MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 271.

international actors who favoured security over transitional justice and reconciliation negatively affected the effectiveness of the Action Plan.

By contrast, the commitment of the Kosovo government to the return process made it easier for the resettlement-related MSPs, including SPARK, as they faced no obstacles at the level of high politics. Instead of dealing with a lacking political support, stakeholders were trying to resolve a number of severe organisational and administrative problems. Still, where the lack of political will was very apparent was at the governmental level outside of the partnership – namely, in Serbia. This was particularly problematic after the Declaration of Independence in 2008, when SPARK ‘lost’ its legal basis (since the role of the UNMIK fundamentally changed and there were no Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo), and the Republic of Serbia would not recognise Kosovo and Kosovo authorities. It was precisely these authorities that not only took full responsibility for the return process, but they also committed themselves to facilitate the return. The changed political status of Kosovo and the attitudes of key actors in the return process thus further undermined the level of trust, which resulted in a significantly smaller number of returnees following the Declaration of Independence in February 2008: in 2008, there were only 680 recorded minority returns, in comparison to 1,700 in 2007 (the numbers are contested, but several sources revealed a similar trend).¹⁸

Secondly, governmental policies and goals cannot be achieved without the participation of the non-governmental sector either. This is particularly the case when it comes to addressing highly sensitive issues of justice, reconciliation, property restitution, or land ownership. As far as MSPs in both post-conflict societies are concerned, the non-governmental sector not only supplemented the roles of governmental actors, but it assumed some of the key tasks that could not be carried out by the governmental actors. For example, the umbrella non-governmental organisation called UNIJA/M, with no formal relationship with SPARK, provided a key link between SPARK activities and the potential beneficiaries living in Serbia. In particular, the UNIJA/M's members were advising returnees and helping them address their needs, and they collected the data on potential returnees, including those living in Serbia. Representatives of the UNIJA/M were inspecting SPARK activities in Kosovo (i.e. building of the houses) and monitoring the

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18 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 226.

social climate in the receiving communities (in particular, if the receiving communities were open and positive towards the return process), and reporting on those activities to the interested individuals back in Serbia.¹⁹

Similarly, the Action Plan in Afghanistan involved a number of NGOs. Indeed, it was through the Action Plan that many civil society organisations were encouraged to participate.²⁰ This was both to compensate for the apparent lack of political will in the central authorities, and to use the Action Plan and external donations to help build Afghan civil society. In fact, the largely undeveloped civil society sector is very common for any post-conflict context and international NGOs will typically help in its development. In Kosovo, this started through the so-called twinning process.²¹

In sum, the complexity of the international community needs to be taken into account in any analysis of international-local linkages within the context of MSPs, not only in terms of the sheer number of different international actors (which creates the problems of competition and co-ordination of their activities), but also in terms of different types of actors. Accordingly, they face both a number of opportunities and constraints in their interactions with the national/local actors in general, and in their effort in peace building in particular.

A difficult post-conflict environment in war-torn societies

Maintaining stability in a crisis area is an essential component for creating a successful working environment for international organisations. Various models, such as power sharing, can be applied to bring about stability (Bieber and Keil 2009), but they do not carry any guarantee that they will eventually serve their purpose – much depends on the complexity of a conflict. However, in war-torn societies, causes of conflicts are

19 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 240.

20 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 82.

21 Thus, the Developing Together (a Kosovar NGO) was formed in 2004 with the help of GOAL Ireland, the UNHCR and the UNDP. See their website at: <http://www.developingtogether.org> [accessed 9 July 2014].

anything but simple (Brown 1993, Ryan 1995). Several challenges need to be addressed; free and fair democratic elections, for example, are a precondition for legitimacy and credibility of the government. If the latter is credible in the eyes of the public, then the work of international organisations will be 'tolerated' and they are unlikely to be perceived as merely 'supporters' of the government in power. Second, stability of the government is another important element for a more cohesive approach by international actors, hopefully in line with what the stable, democratically elected government sees as key priorities. Frequent changes in government, frictions in coalitions or a generally weak government (further weakened by corruption scandals, among others) damage the continuity of relations between international organisations and governmental officials. In a similar fashion, successful management of inter-ethnic relations (which are often the main instrument for the occurrence of a conflict in the first place, although there is nothing to suggest that ethnic differences as such lead to conflict – see Ryan 1995: 23) leads to a more stable working environment for international organisations. Last but not least, the adherence to basic norms such as the rule of law, human rights and the fight against corruption would make it easier for international organisations to do their work.

As already indicated, hardly any of these conditions are met in war-torn societies, recently emerged or still emerging (Afghanistan) from a violent conflict. This meant that the MSPs working in the field of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building, needed international involvement that had to go way beyond mere 'moral support' – not just in terms of funding, but above all in terms of providing the personnel with the skills and legitimacy needed to carry out the planned activities aimed to contribute towards relationship-(re)building. In Kosovo, for example, the high sensitivity of the return process and the lack of legitimate and skilled local administration meant that international actors were directly and hands-on involved in SPARK. They served as mediators between the communities (formerly) in conflict (which was particularly important when the Serbs were blocking any communication with the Albanian authorities, deemed as illegitimate by Serbia), for they were perceived as more independent, credible and trustful.²²

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22 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 267.

The lack of local capabilities and very poor competences of the local administration directly involved in carrying out SPARK's objective was something that the international community was aware of. Accordingly, one of the goals of SPARK was also to help the locals gain the necessary competences to be able to carry out the return process on their own. However, because international actors were perceived, at least initially, as more legitimate, apolitical, more competent and impartial, but also more effective, such local capacity building was limited in its scope and success. The transfer of competences was further affected by the final settlement of the political status of Kosovo, whereby local and municipal authorities were expected to develop their competences and follow the norms and standards before the decision on the final status was going to be made. In practice, however, this logic was not followed and the issue of the final status very much affected day-to-day politics, including the functioning of SPARK.²³

Furthermore, political culture and corruption in Kosovo made it very difficult for any partnership to function efficiently. SPARK was no exception in this respect. The ministry responsible for the return process (i.e. the MCR) changed four heads (ministers) in four years, either due to corruption scandals or due to their over prioritisation of some municipalities.²⁴ In such an environment, it is very difficult to achieve trust, confidence or even fairness. Such an environment will also further support the views that international actors, present on the ground with their international staff, will be respected more, and the word by these internationals will be taken more seriously than a word by an equally qualified and competent Kosovar. Similarly, endeavours of local organisations will come second to those of international actors: the relevant stakeholders will prefer to work with international, rather than local, organisations.²⁵ Such perceptions, of course, negatively affect the long-term peace building process at the national/local level and they can hardly contribute to effective relationship-(re)building.

Because in the initial phases of the post-conflict reconstruction efforts, there are hardly any competent (skilled) local administrators, and very

23 MultiPart: Report 4d, pp. 237–8, 273.

24 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 252.

25 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 257.

few at the national level, international actors are faced with several process-related obstacles that are, however, essential in achieving the final objectives of any joint project, including the MSPs' specific goals. One of the effects of both MSPs in the issue-area under consideration was therefore the process of capacity-building. International actors played a crucial role – either before the official beginning of an individual MSP, or during its duration (SPARK). SPARK in particular was always aimed at enabling the national and local institutions in Kosovo (the governmental and municipalities) to be able to carry out the return process on their own, in co-operation with the non-governmental sector.²⁶ Capacity building by international actors has, of course, not been limited to the context of individual MSPs.

One of the problems international actors face when they 'enter' a country is the selection of their local partners. Frequently, the same individuals (typically educated in the West or able to speak English) end up working in many different projects. An even worse case scenario would lead to co-opting powerful individuals, some of which may have even played an active role during the conflict itself. For international actors working in the field of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building, such an intentional or unintentional involvement of those individuals – with a view to protecting (some) foreign interests, by some (typically more powerful) international actors – is even more problematic as it may undermine any effort in peace building in post-conflict societies. Both MSPs under examination had to deal with the presence of such powerful individuals: warlords sitting in the Afghan government, and some local mayors, former leading figures in the Kosovo Liberation Army who had the power and credibility among the local population to carry out the minority return process should they decide to do so.²⁷

Perhaps an even more problematic issue is the lack of support, rather than merely lack of competences and skills or organisational difficulties, by the high-level politicians in a post-conflict society itself. International involvement in post-conflict reconstruction is based on the assumption

26 MultiPart: *Report 4d*, pp. 236, 248, 258.

27 MultiPart: *Report 4d*. In our interviews in Kosovo in 2010, many individuals pointed at some 'very efficient mayors' in the return process, and when asked why some municipalities assure a relatively wide return process and some made very little progress, they typically referred to the mayors. When further asked about those specific mayors, it was clear that they won the elections due to their leadership skills during the war. For a full list of 19 in-depth interviews conducted to analyse the formation and functioning of SPARK, see MultiPart: *Report 4d*, pp. 278–9.

that international help is not just needed, but it is also welcome at the local level, by war-torn societies. Once the political system is (re-)established, it is assumed that the newly elected government and other institutions would continue supporting joint post-conflict reconstruction, with an ever increasing number of competences being transferred to and assumed by the local (elected) institutions and individuals occupying the posts. However, such local support may be lacking, particularly with respect to such sensitive issues as those appertaining to the process of reconciliation, including transitional justice. In this respect, President Karzai's ambiguous attitudes towards the Action Plan need to be mentioned.

In order to address such a serious problem of lacking domestic support, the Action Plan's stakeholders called on international organisations to attach some conditions to their funding.²⁸ The system of conditionality has been developed in greater detail by international institutions such as the EU, in its external relations with third countries (including in the area of donor aid), and more recently, in the process of enlargement (Pridham 2005, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005, Bechev 2006, Schimmelfennig 2008, Sedelmeier 2008), leading to what has been described as 'network governance' (Lavenex 2008). The concept of conditionality can, indeed, be usefully applied also to a post-conflict setting where (international) pragmatism will not guarantee progress in all essential issue-areas to be dealt with. The unpopular and highly sensitive issue-area of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building is particularly vulnerable to negative consequences of pragmatic internal politics as both case studies of MSPs have demonstrated.²⁹

28 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 108.

29 See MultiPart: Report 4d.

Internal organisation and behaviour of international actors

In specific post-conflict settings, where international involvement is urgently needed to promote and support the efforts aimed at relationship-(re)building, scholarly attention is first and foremost focused on environment-related factors affecting the success rate of those endeavours. Whereas contextual circumstances, particularly the lack of functioning institutions, lack of inter-community trust, and a very difficult socio-economic situation (e.g. high unemployment, hardly any intra-state income-generating economic activity), clearly have a crucial impact on the functioning of MSPs working in the issue-area under examination here, some other least likely factors affecting this process, though indirectly, should not be overlooked. In particular, the very organisation and functioning of international actors, in general, and international institutions, in particular, warrant more attention. For some forms of behaviour of individual international actors, or the lack thereof, can have a significant impact on the functioning of MSPs and, consequently, on their effect on the processes of relationship-(re)building.

There are several aspects to this issue. With respect to states and their roles in MSPs, particularly as donors, their involvement in post-conflict reconstruction depends on several factors. These include a specific commitment to helping societies with which individual countries have been linked historically (e.g. during the period of colonisation), politically (e.g. within the same multi-national state such as Yugoslavia), ethnically (transnational ethnic ties have been known to affect the foreign policy of individual states; see Moore and Davis 1998), or economically (e.g. if a country sees economic potential in a post-conflict society, it may be willing to contribute to different aspects of post-conflict reconstruction, also with a view to gaining trust and legitimacy or to establish contacts). Individual states can be involved in post-conflict reconstruction efforts also for purely or at least predominantly normative reasons – to help establish democratic societies, where human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully respected, and basic needs provided. Scandinavian countries in particular have established themselves as such honest ‘norm promoters’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

Whereas states have a number of legitimate interests in helping others to overcome the problems related to a specific post-conflict situation, of such interests some are problematic, as are the motivations for their involvement in other countries. Importantly, such interests and motivations can change over time as they are subject to governmental support (note a changing focus of the USA in Afghanistan, which made it hard for the partners in the Action Plan to effectively focus on reconciliation and transitional justice). A government may also decide to shift its geographical foreign policy priorities, to ignore the newly emerging needs in some regions or to readjust the amount of foreign aid. Or, a government with a clear interest in international post-conflict efforts can lose elections and be replaced by a differently oriented government. All these will undoubtedly affect any process of relationship-(re)building and MSPs working to achieve this goal.

From a theoretical perspective, international actors (states) play a two level game, whereby their behaviour at the international level is also closely related to the developments (interests, power, norms and values) domestically (see Putnam 1988). In order to understand the role of the international community in MSPs and in post-conflict reconstruction more generally, one needs to understand and monitor also the domestic level of international actors. In other words, the local/national context bears a double significance – in a post-conflict country itself, and in other states involved in post-conflict reconstruction, possibly within MSPs.

With respect to international institutions, the intra-actor explanations would include issues that appertain to the way an institution is organised, and consequently, to the issue of as to whether or not an institution is capable and willing to provide the help most needed and most expected by actors in war-torn societies. In this respect, MSPs are a very useful tool for addressing specific needs at the local level, particularly if a partnership is made of competent institutions that seek to complement each other, rather than compete against each other, in the post-conflict reconstruction. This minimises any duplication of work and is likely to increase effectiveness on the ground.

As international organisations are themselves dependent on member states and their willingness to support them financially, politically and organisationally, such a co-ordinated endeavour that addresses the 'right' needs at the right time, without any unnecessary delay, may be a huge task. It is difficult for

international governmental institutions to live up to the many expectations at the local level, in individual post-conflict societies.³⁰ They are often blamed for inaction although it can be their member states that purposefully ignore clearly stated local needs as presented to member states by the staff of those organisations. As a result, those organisations may be faced with bad reputation in a particular area, and their future involvement will be much more difficult if not impossible.

In other cases, however, the intra-institutional (political) dynamics can prevent international institutions from acting, or from acting effectively. For instance, the EU is frequently blamed for its ineffectiveness, which is made even worse given its normative and political power. In other words, what can be observed with respect to the EU are its economic power, as well as its unparalleled normative power (Manners 2002). Local actors (in post-conflict societies) thus look up to the EU for help in their reconstruction and in peace building efforts. Indeed, as argued by Diez and Pace (2007: 1), the EU's ability to transform conflicts through its involvement in partnerships or directly "largely depends on this acceptance of the notion of normative power Europe."

Thus, it was the EU that – even in the wake of US-led prioritising security of Afghanistan over reconciliation – clearly stated its continuous commitment to, among others, strengthening Afghanistani civil institutions and implementing the Action Plan. According to a Swedish diplomat, interviewed to assess the role of the EU in the functioning of the Action Plan, the EU's commitment in this respect was logical given that for the EU, "the rule of law, securing peace and justice is vital to Afghanistan and they need to be strengthened. [...] Impunity from punishment is not acceptable and no one entitles impunity".³¹ Still, the changing attitudes in Washington (i.e. decreased support to the transitional justice process in Afghanistan as this was perceived to endanger the most important goal – security), have weakened the leverage of the EU within the Action Plan. The empirical analysis of the Action Plan demonstrates that the EU has been very influential in some aspects of the Action Plan, it has also failed to meet the expectations to use its normative commitment in relation

30 This state of affairs has been well portrayed by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros-Boutros Ghali. Asked about the efficiency of UN peace operations, with specific reference to the prospects of USA withdrawal from Somalia in 1993, he replied: "I can do nothing. I have no army, I have no money, I have no experts. I am borrowing everything. If the member states don't want, what can I do? The reality is to avoid giving promises which you are not able to fulfil." (Meisler 1993).

31 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 112.

to Washington.

Although the EU is perceived as a political, economic and normative power, with a significant leverage, governments such as Kosovo's (although in Kosovo, the Americans are perceived as 'liberators', following the US-led NATO operation in the 1990s, and the EU's normative power stems largely from Kosovo's goal to become a member of the EU), local actors, including stakeholders in MSPs working in the issue-area of relationships-(re)building, have observed that the EU is significantly weakened by its intra-institutional dynamics. It tends to be perceived as a somewhat problematic partner because, as it was frequently observed, it does not speak with one voice, and it never makes decisions fast.³² In Afghanistan, the EU was perceived as not having used all of its potential to help in peace building efforts, due to a lack of sufficient co-ordination by the member states and also due to the lack of their willingness to share 'their prestige' in their effort, and because of their mutual competition, which painfully displayed their collective inability to implement the goals in the post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan.³³

Another general aspect of the intra-institutional dynamics, particularly relevant in the context of MSPs working in the issue-area that is analysed here, is related to planning and to its time dimension. In particular, it is very clear that peace-building is a very long-term goal that requires a set of carefully planned and executed activities. This, however, appears to be far from the annual budgets of international actors, as well as from their slow intra-institutional procedures to approve specific projects. In general, international institutions have been criticised by local stakeholders for the duration of their internal procedures (i.e. between an initiative and a decision by an institution that it was going to support the initiative), and for the uncertainty of this process.³⁴

Such uncertainty or short-term projects eager to satisfy constituencies (voters) in donor countries can negatively affect the already fragile trust and confidence among the communities, or it can diminish all efforts for building trust in local institutions. If they stop providing certain services, or if

32 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 269.

33 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 112

34 This also applies to the Action Plan (MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 96).

they stop working in a specific issue-area (e.g. the return process can slow down if funds are not available; if truth seeking commissions stop working, this will further increase the perception of injustice), this is likely to have negative effects on the long-term peace-building efforts, but it can also undermine the steps already taken towards this goal.

International institutions further face a potential problem of sustaining 'institutional memory' when it comes to field-related projects. The relatively frequent personnel turn-over, particularly in countries such as Afghanistan, makes it more difficult to retain the trust and good working relations between the internationals and the locals. This is of course essential, particularly in the most sensitive issues in a post-conflict setting. International organisations were also faced with the issue of their credibility, particularly with respect to the high costs of their own operation. This is particularly problematic in war-torn societies, faced with the problem of fulfilling even the most basic human needs. In Kosovo, where the bulk of the money for the return process was contributed by the Kosovo government, this was very apparent. The UNDP in particular was frequently faced with complaints that international organisations were simply too expensive and that they are spending money that should go towards the actual process of minority return.³⁵

Concluding remarks

Both cases of MSPs working towards the goal of relationship-(re)building in Kosovo and Afghanistan have demonstrated both the value and the problems associated with this new form of multilateral management of a particular issue-area. Of course, the issue-area of interest here is a very sensitive one in a post-conflict context. Furthermore, it is an issue-area that requires long-term commitment that will hopefully bring about the desirable results in the long term, with many immediate and mid-term steps in this direction. Both MSPs, the Action Plan and SPARK, need to be assessed as providing a number of such smaller steps. Still, as the analysis

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35 MultiPart: Report 4d, p. 268.

of both MSPs has revealed, they do offer some important insights into the functioning of MSPs in the field of relationship-(re)building – i.e. insights that are useful for understanding the role of international actors in governing this issue-area, and that point us in the direction of further research of MSPs or post-conflict reconstruction in general.

In post-conflict societies, efforts to secure reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building largely depend on the involvement of the international community. As these processes necessarily require the participation of local actors, the MSP context appears to provide a suitable way of collectively managing the issue-area of relationships-(re)building. International actors (above all international governmental organisations and individual states, acting alone or within those organisations) can indeed affect the functioning of MSPs and consequently actions and policies of national (local) actors in a post-conflict society. Such external incentives can be reasonably expected to both contribute to inter-community relationship-(re)building and foster long-term reconciliation, but they can also prevent such processes from taking place, or slow them down significantly. In other words, the presence of international actors alone, even though they will co-ordinate their activities in the framework of an MSP, does not in itself guarantee any reconciliation. In fact, there are a number of obstacles that need to be borne in mind to avoid worsening the situation on the ground. As the empirical research of the two selected MSPs in these countries has demonstrated, the role of the international community, particularly international governmental organisations, individual states and international NGOs, in post-conflict settings can be very ambiguous.

At least four conclusions can be drawn from the two case studies. Firstly, any competition in values and goals between key international stakeholders is likely to slow down relationship-(re)building nationally. Secondly, international actors are likely to be more successful with the projects they fund if there is strong national and local support for the goals that are to be achieved by MSPs. Thirdly, MSPs in the issue-area of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building will function better if partners properly deal with the individuals that played an active role during the conflict as those individuals may have a significant impact on the results of MSPs. Fourthly, intra-institutional

dynamics matter: international actors (international organisations in particular) will achieve more if they are well organised internally so that local actors will see them as credible partners (it will be even better if this credibility only supplements the overall trust in those institutions due to their role in the conflict management process).

Of course, to fully understand the influence and impact of MSPs or international actors that participate in such partnerships in the management of post-conflict societies such as Kosovo and Afghanistan, one must also identify the main factors that facilitate or constrain such influence. For example, in terms of a political system: are the countries in question democracies? What kind of 'help' can third countries provide to war-torn societies/countries? Are there any issues from history that have so far not been successfully addressed (e.g. border delimitation, minorities, intra-ethnic conflicts etc.) but will necessarily address the broader process of reconciliation, for example? What is the distribution of power – is there an equilibrium or is it that one or more countries in the region have a preponderant role? What is the state of the economy in a country and in the broader region?

Once these questions are answered, research will need to focus on unveiling some causal mechanisms between the composition and functioning of MSPs and their end results in terms of post-conflict reconstruction. This will need to be done by at least two levels of analysis, both focusing on the context (structure) and actors: firstly, at the level of the international community itself, characterised by its complex structure, with many different actors seeking to achieve their own objectives in a very competitive environment; secondly, at the national/local level where there are many difficult conditions in war-torn societies that are operationally/institutionally unable to begin any peace building processes on their own, and where characteristics (motivations, organisation) of international actors themselves will certainly matter when it comes to relationship-(re)building efforts in the context of MSPs.

Because these factors have an impact on how international institutions function, they are relevant also for studying the functioning of MSPs, in their entire 'life cycle'. As international institutions play a very important role in international governance, they can be expected to have an

impact on the formation of MSPs, on their performance and on their effects. By implication, the international community can therefore influence the processes of reconciliation, inter-communal bridge-building and confidence-building. What is still very much unknown is how these processes can be stirred in the desirable direction, for there are many obstacles that can prevent international institutions from helping to promote inter-communal relationship building in post-conflict societies.

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